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USING AND ABUSING CHILDREN IN GREEK TRAGEDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Vulnerable children are crucial in Greek tragedy and to the philosophy of suffering that it explores. They attract high levels of emotional concern that spill over from the human arena into the divine. As a means of exposing the presence or absence of the power and influence of the gods, children in tragedy are pivotal voices in the integrity and survival of the tragic family. The literary, social and historical contexts within which this importance falls are set out in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 investigates how tragedy features important roles for vulnerable children and how ritual human sacrifice and murder highlight the importance of divine intervention in family life. Chapter 3 looks at the underlying reasons for parents killing their children and examines how this can destroy the family unit by eradicating the family line and preventing the continuance of name and inheritance. The chapter also analyses how divine interference can override a parent's will and sense of right. Chapter 4 considers how the killing of parents by children destroys the vertical family structure and so threatens a crucial aspect of social order. It analyses how the plays test allegiances, power relations and filial obligations to the limit and, within this context, the involvement of the gods creates different levels of liability and degrees of authority. Chapter 5 shows how when planning to murder the most vulnerable children, or in circumstances of abandonment or illegitimacy, the relative power and influence of the divine and human is brought under conclusive and central scrutiny. From this the Conclusion pinpoints the importance of children in Greek tragedy in (i) showing the family capable of repairing itself and establishing values sufficient for it to recover from the worst events, and (ii) suggesting that this can be done without the

involvement, interference, or influence of the gods. This realisation offers a fresh aspect to further analyses of Greek tragedy, its form and implications.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE AND ABBREVIATIONS

Editions of ancient texts and commentaries are referenced under the editors' names.

Quotations and citations from the Greek are taken from Aris & Phillips or Loeb editions unless otherwise noted. Translations from the Greek are my own unless otherwise indicated. Greek words used in the main text have been transliterated throughout.

Abbreviations

OCD The Oxford Classical dictionary, 3rd ed.

TLG Thesaurus linguae Graecae

All other abbreviations follow the Oxford Classical dictionary, 3rd ed.

1 INTRODUCTION: CHILDHOOD ANCIENT AND MODERN

ἔπειτ' ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἐπῶν οὐδένα παρήκ' ἄν ἀπγόν,
ἀλλ' ἔλεγεω ἢ γυνὴ τέ μοι χῶ δοῦλος οὐδὲν ἦττον
χῶ δεσπότης χῆ παρθένος χῆ γραῦς ἄν.

Again, from the very first words, I wouldn't leave any character idle:

I would make the wife speak, and the slave just as much, and the master, and the
maiden, and the old crone.

(*Ran.* 949-52)

In Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs*, the parodied character Euripides indicates that everyone should have a voice — women, slaves, men, the young and the old. This thesis intends to locate the 'voices' of children in Greek tragedy, their relationship to and interactions with other family members, their place in the family environment, and the consequences that ensue from these factors. The children concerned are children of different ages who, as well as being exposed to internal family rivalries, are subject to the effects of various external human and divine influences. A child in this context is any person with a parent or parents, uncles or grandparents in a family relationship. In some cases, the children may not be biologically related to their parents. For example, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Polybus and Merope raise Oedipus as their son and in *The Children of Heracles*, Iolaus shows parental concern for

Macaria. On this interpretation children appear in the majority of extant tragedies as major players in the family unit.¹ Speaking parts and onstage presence give an opportunity for these ‘dramatic’ children to be heard and voice opinions when they are faced with death, need to avenge a dead parent, are abandoned, or experience the effects of illegitimacy. Even if the children do not have a major part in the plays or are too young to speak (e.g. Heracles’ sons and Medea’s sons) they are presented through the perspective of their parents or other adults. The plays in which children are killed (e.g. children who are sacrificed such as Iphigenia or Polyxena and children who are killed by their parents such as Pentheus) or in which children are the killers (e.g. Orestes and Oedipus) are those that have the potential to communicate the most suffering.

Despite the fact that tragedies can end happily (e.g. *Andromache* and *Ion*), they generally end with suffering or death for the main protagonists (e.g. *Hippolytus* and *Hecuba*). According to Aristotle, the elements that provoke pity and fear² occur “whenever the tragic deed ... is done within the family — when murder or the like is done or meditated by brother on brother, by son on father, by mother on son, or son on mother” (*Poet.* 1453b.19-20).³ An outcome of this portrayal of pity and fear,

¹ There are some plays in which children and their parents are absent. Nevertheless, even when vertical familial relationships appear to be in the background they are necessary for the development of the plot: *Helen* (the relationship between Proteus and his daughter); *Iphigenia in Tauris* (absent parents, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, for Iphigenia and Orestes); *Philoctetes* (the surrogate father-son relationship between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes); *Seven Against Thebes* (Eteocles has a paternal attitude towards the citizens in the opening scene); and *Prometheus Bound* (Prometheus is paternal towards Io).

² Aristotle says that the necessarily complex plot must include “incidents arousing pity and fear” (*Poet.* 1452a.1-2).

³ According to Aristotle, the plot must include “some deed of horror” (*Poet.* 1453a.22) and incorporation of this ‘most tragic’ feature in the plot leads to the “theoretically best tragedy” (*Poet.* 1453a.23). On Aristotle’s view, Euripides is the most tragic poet (*Poet.* 1453a.28-30), even though his management of the material may be faulty.

according to Stephen Halliwell, engages the audience both cognitively and ethically and brings about “imaginative” sympathy with the characters.⁴ In other words, family tragedies allow the audience to empathise with those involved. Aristotle’s thinking on this underlies the principle used in this research — that the treatment and actions of children in tragic drama afford, perhaps, the most powerful means of expressing the tragic elements.

Such extremes of human emotion and family despair are explored by the playwrights directly through the children’s voices and experiences, and also indirectly through the voices of the Chorus and the Messengers who describe such killings and whose reports are important descriptions of the action for the audience. For example, the Chorus in *Agamemnon* gives a poignant account of how Iphigenia was prepared for sacrifice but does not recount the actual killing (*Ag.* 228-48);⁵ and a Messenger in the *Bacchae* describes the gruesome killing of Pentheus by his mother and the bacchantes (*Bacch.* 1095-1146). The voices of these tragic children, who appear defenceless and vulnerable against the actions of adults, and the Chorus and Messengers’ accounts of them clearly shaped audience response, even if there is no direct evidence of this.

In order to provide a background to this study, a coherent concept of children and childhood in antiquity needs to be established both from selected ancient sources and from modern scholarship. An interdisciplinary overview of relevant scholarship brings out the advantages and drawbacks of different methodologies, and helps

⁴ (Halliwell, 1987, p.125).

⁵ The sacrifice of Euripides’ Iphigenia is not witnessed either. The army and her father turn their heads to the ground when her throat is cut (*IA.* 1577-83).

highlight methodologies useful when establishing an understanding of children in Greek tragedy.⁶

Interpretation of the status, role and importance of children varies from era to era according to the evidence it uses and its reliability, previous interpretations, social and conceptual norms, and the gender, age and inclinations of the various interpreters. Children in ancient times are often perceived as lacking what is generally considered parental or social care. Lloyd deMause suggests that children in the past were not cared for as much and were more likely to be killed, abused or beaten than those in later centuries.⁷ Such a view treats children as objects to be used and dealt with by their parents. Others, such as Hugh Cunningham, consider that parents had a more 'caring' attitude towards their children.⁸ However, it is the lack of the subjective 'voices' of children that makes acquiring any firm grasp on the role and place of children in the family and society difficult. This is problematic because the historian's 'lens' is always mediated by how children are constructed in the sources that they review.⁹

This difficulty is particularly acute in fifth century BC Athens, where the significance of children is more bound up with parental concerns such as children being 'carriers' of the family name, functioning as objects for exchange, as the custodians of family rites and responsibilities, or for tending parents in old age. In

⁶ This chapter focuses on modern scholarship about children, parents and family in ancient Greece. The topic is paralleled in ancient Rome by, for example, Dixon (Dixon, 1988), (Dixon, 1992) and Rawson (Rawson, 2005).

⁷ (deMause, 1974, p.1).

⁸ Cunningham suggests that, in Britain, from the Middle Ages onwards parents cared for their children (Cunningham, 2006, p.21).

⁹ See Hardwick's 'Reception Within Antiquity' (Hardwick, 2003, pp.12-31).

Athenian society, citizenship laws passed by Pericles (Plut. *Vit. Per.* 37) meant children could only be lawful Athenian citizens if both parents were Athenians.¹⁰ As every child in the *oikos* had to be legitimate in order to claim their inheritance and continue the family name, children can be seen as a commodity to be valued, at least, from the viewpoint of economics.¹¹ Froma Zeitlin believes the reasons given why children were valued in the fifth century BC (e.g. because of citizenship laws or to increase the population after a war or a disaster) are part conjecture. These reasons, Zeitlin suggests, only level out the “range and intensity of Euripides’ prominent focus on the child’s condition in his theatre”.¹²

Very little, if anything, is known about the subjective voices of ancient children in Athenian society. The nature of the evidence from antiquity (e.g. literary texts, visual representations, historical sources) creates a modern day tendency to think of certain attitudes and emotions as abiding over time — this represents a continuity model. Along with this is a tendency to think modern childhood is somehow different from childhood in history — it changes over time. The debate on ‘continuity and/or change’ is a contentious issue for classical scholars; and the difficulties of balancing obvious ‘change over time’ with the apparent persistence of certain supposedly ‘universal’ themes are similarly debated. The problem lies then in

¹⁰ In Euripides’ plays, however, illegitimate children such as Ion and Molossos did inherit their parents’ wealth and continued the family name. The ‘mythical’ situations in the plays do not exactly replicate Athenian social conditions.

¹¹ This commercial view of children was also important for the *polis*. Athenian children would defend their city and if they died then, as Pericles suggests and encourages, parents could have more children (Thuc. 2.44).

¹² (Zeitlin, 2008, p.331). There can be other reasons for parents to value their children such as emotional concern for their welfare. There are many examples in Euripidean tragedy of such intense feelings. Hecuba would die to save the life of Polyxena (*Hec.* 385), Heracles loves his sons (*HF.* 629) as does Creon (*Phoen.* 966).

the contradictory trajectories — to investigate the commonalities in ancient and modern family experiences and emotions, while at the same time acknowledging a great difference in social, legal and emotional values. One approach is to analyse how the ancient family is represented in epic poetry and the tragedies (the dynamics derived from the dramatic structure and development of the tragic plots). Ancient sources that deal with the family of the gods raise questions about how children were ‘situated’ culturally in the divine family structure and highlight some differences between the divine family and the tragic family. Another approach is to analyse how tragedy drew on the cultural context of myth rather than its immediate present.

For ancient Greeks the notion of the tragic family as part of their cultural framework stretches back to the heart of the creation myths described in the narrative epic poetry of Homer and Hesiod. Here, pitching gods and humans into conflict soon occurs once the problem of behaving properly within Zeus’ regime is tackled. As heroes emerge so the relationship with the gods intensifies and becomes ever more complicated. At the same time meaningful comparisons and contrasts, particularly in respect of conflict and emotions, are made between human and divine family life. The lives of the gods, therefore, provided a solid and well-known foundation of stories for the fifth century BC playwrights to adapt and recreate for the drama festivals. Their audiences’ horizon of understanding would stretch to some knowledge of these myths, of accepted roles within family environments both human and divine (and to both a conceptual and imaginative sense of social responsibility).

Within Greek tragedy children’s voices are pivotal, although not so much as a means of providing an insight into the ‘nature’ of ancient children but as vehicles for the high emotions that are naturally generated by children’s experiences and their mistreatment. Children in Greek tragedy are used and abused by parents and others

in order to satisfy adults' own ends — Iphigenia, for example, is sacrificed to divine ordinance so her father can lead the armies to Troy. Adults emphasize the vulnerability of children to those who hold power over them — Medea, for example, kills her children. Such actions have far reaching consequences for the family structure in the plays. Apparently distant from lived human experience in the fifth century BC, the plays also provide a dramatic context against which human psychology can be laid bare and explored, and beyond that enable the power balance held between gods and humans to be exposed and investigated.

1.1 Histories of childhood

If it is the case that drama affords a 'window' on reality,¹³ it is imperative to gain an understanding of the ancient accounts of children and their childhood. It is also important to understand that conceptions of ancient children and their childhood are framed through the 'lens' of thinking from a modern viewpoint and acknowledging that there is an inevitable temporal and cultural displacement between the original ancient source and any subsequent material students might study.¹⁴ Awareness that the ancient audience had their frame of experiential and cultural construction, conditioned by their cultural and societal experiences and their understanding of the myths, is relevant when looking back to the past. Dramatic children cannot be properly understood unless their significant differences from our 'modern' understanding of children are disclosed. These differences bring out characteristics of

¹³ Hall "suggests that through some recurrent types of plot-pattern tragedy affirmed in its citizen spectators' imaginations the social world in which they lived" (Hall, 1997, p.93). Although Hall's focus is on "mythical Athenians interacting with outsiders" women and slaves, her views can also apply to children.

¹⁴ See Rochelle for a discussion on the various problems with the diasporic gulf (i.e. the societal movement over time bringing with it its own cultural heritage and identity) (Rochelle, 2011).

behaviour distinct in their psychology and temperament as well as distinct in their place and importance in the family.

There are broadly speaking two different approaches to the history of children and childhood over recent years — sociological and child-centered. Aspects of both have relevance for research into the ancient child. Philippe Ariès formulated the proposition that childhood is a social construct.¹⁵ He suggests that childhood was not ‘experienced’ before the mid eighteenth century (in France and Europe) because childhood had not been ‘invented’. The absence of a concept of childhood, however, does not necessarily mean that what categorises childhood did not exist.¹⁶ Ariès also distinguishes between the ‘idea’ of childhood and feelings of concern for children.¹⁷ His analysis is drawn from looking at children’s clothes, their games and education and visual sources from the tenth century AD that portrayed children as miniature adults.¹⁸ Ariès also argues that childhood cannot be compared across cultures, and that it is not a universal constant, but changes over time.¹⁹

DeMause, arguing for an evolutionary history of childhood, agrees with Ariès that parents (before the seventeenth century) did not see their children as separate beings. He suggests that the “further back in history one goes, the lower the level of

¹⁵ (Ariès, 1962).

¹⁶ See Pollock for a critical appraisal of Ariès’ work (Pollock, 1983, pp.1-5).

¹⁷ Ariès points out that a ‘sentimental’ attitude to the caring for children first appeared in the sixteenth century when “mothers and nannies” expressed concern for the children they looked after (Ariès, 1962, p.129).

¹⁸ (Ariès, 1962, p.10). This has some similarity to Archaic art in which, as Beaumont suggests, children were portrayed as miniature adults (Beaumont, 2003, p.75).

¹⁹ The idea that the characteristics of childhood are culturally determined was put forward early in the twentieth century by the anthropologist Margaret Mead. She suggested that childhood is not a cross-cultural worldwide concept and, through studies on adolescent women in Samoa, attempted to show that children are shaped by the cultural patterns of their own society — the influences are biological potential and not genetic (Mead, 2001, p.xii).

child care”.²⁰ Working on evidence drawn from different centuries and cultures deMause’s study concentrated on abuse and cruelty towards children. Lawrence Stone, using quantitative methods for his work on the family and marriage from 1500-1800, has similar ideas about the position of children in the family environment. He maintains that the lack of child care and emotional support would have had a harmful effect on children in terms of their hierarchical position in the family (and so their importance in the family context) and their psychological development.²¹ Aries, deMause and Stone all use children and childhood as topics for investigating emotional sources of social conduct of certain groups but, as J. Kett cautions in his review on deMause’s work, the findings may not be representative or extensive (particularly in the case of female infanticide) and the “cultural, economic and demographic” aspects should not be ignored when analysing the treatment of children.²²

The views of Ariès, deMause and Stone have attracted few followers in recent years, due largely to a movement towards the idea of ‘continuity’ of children’s experiences throughout history led by scholars such as Linda Pollock and Cunningham. The main objections to Ariès’ ideas come from those who do not easily accept that the concept of childhood changed with historical change.²³ Ariès’ work, although forming the basis for many contemporary in-depth studies into the concept

²⁰ Child care here means caring about what happens to children.

²¹ (Stone, 1977). This idea can be dated back to at least Aristotle’s thoughts on parents and their sons. Aristotle said that unlike the Persians, who treated their sons as slaves, the Greeks (in a patriarchal way) cared for their children (*Eth. Nic.* 1160b.25-8).

²² (Kett, 1975, p.1296).

²³ Cox suggests Ariès is interested more in the “idea of the family”, not the experiences of being in a family (Cox, 1996, p.4).

of childhood, does not offer any interpretations that take into account the ‘voices’ of children that are crucial to this thesis, and except for an understanding of the view of ‘change’, is therefore not for lengthy consideration here.

Pollock shows how the emphasis has moved from ‘change’ to ‘continuity’.²⁴ She contests the views of Ariès, deMause and Stone and finds evidence from diaries and autobiographies belonging to children, to indicate that any change should be examined alongside continuity. She suggests that within the family environment of every culture are the (universally continuing) emotions of love and concern. Pollock’s evidence suggests that parents ‘universally’ care for their children, mourn their deaths and are concerned about their upbringing. From Pollock’s analysis of ‘real’ experiences of children, it appears, through analysis of her primary sources that more ‘modern’ (i.e. more child-centred) concepts of childhood existed in the sixteenth century, and that children were treated then, much as they are now. This suggests the ‘family’ could be considered a ‘constant’ throughout (at least in that period of) history. Although this may be helpful in any attempt to ‘reach back’ and find some identification with the ancient family, there remains a particular and fundamental difference between the ancient family and the contemporary nuclear family. Unlike the nuclear family, generally with a pair of adults and their children, the ancient aristocratic family or *oikos* usually involved many others and could consist of family members, nurses, tutors and slaves with the oldest male taking responsibility for his household. The subjective voices of ancient children are rare — material was only written by adults (usually elite males),²⁵ so the ‘real’ experiences

²⁴ (Pollock, 1983).

²⁵ (M. Golden, 1993, p.xvi).

of children are subject to the confines of the ideological agenda of the particular adults (i.e. patriarchy).

The idea that a family cannot be looked at as the “standard product of some universal social mix”²⁶ is proposed by Steven Ozment. After considering the evidence offered by Ariès and Stone, Ozment questions the alleged lack of affection in families and suggests, like Pollock, that there is a continuation of emotional feelings towards children from the ancient past to the present. By extension, in households of wealthy families in fifth century BC, ‘affection’ may be given by those more broadly involved in ‘caring’ (e.g. nurses and tutors who may have ‘cared’ for the children in their charge). This sentiment is found, for example, in Aeschylus’ *The Libation Bearers* where the Nurse is distraught when she believes Orestes is dead (*Cho.* 734-65). Notwithstanding the paucity of reliable evidence from ancient Greece, and the importance placed by most sociological and historical perspectives on the families and children in the household and society, the arguments of Pollock and Ozment support the idea of (at least some) continuous attitudinal view about children. This idea joins more recent well-documented and evidenced times to an historic period where this support is lacking.

In an attempt to ‘reach’ more towards children than to their childhood, Allison James and Alan Prout comment (from their research started in 1970) on the paradigm shift that considers biological immaturity, not childhood, as the universal and natural feature of human life in its early stages.²⁷ Unlike Pollock, they argue that childhood is bound by class, gender and ethnicity and that it should be studied, not through social construction by adults, but according to the involvement of children in

²⁶ (Ozment, 2001, p.7).

²⁷ (James & Prout, 1997, p.3).

the development of their own social lives.²⁸ This gives children a voice in society — to be understood as shapers of society as well as being shaped by their circumstances. Although James, Chris Jenks and Prout recognise the problems involved in locating the ‘voices’ of children²⁹, their thoughts on childhood as “*presociological* in character”³⁰ move away from seeing children as ‘inferior adults’ acceptable only in their future potential and not in their present being.³¹ Children, on this view, are not just a category but have a central place in society and relevance in their own right.³²

Cunningham also believes that children are “agents in the making of their lives and their world”,³³ individuals separate from their parents or other adults’ actions. His methodology is similar to Pollock’s. Considering a wide variety of source material, he looks at coroners’ reports and court records, articles from newspapers and other documents, nursery rhymes and poetry, as well as letters and diaries written by children. This broad ranging examination reveals evidence connected to children’s feelings within the family environment and society and draws out the ways children lived and how they differed (or not) throughout the centuries.³⁴ Cunningham’s central argument is that, although childhood has changed

²⁸ (James & Prout, 1990, p.4).

²⁹ (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998, p.6).

³⁰ (James et al., 1998, p.3).

³¹ (James et al., 1998, pp.9-17).

³² (James et al., 1998, p.6).

³³ (Cunningham, 2006, p.16).

³⁴ Diaries such as those written by Anne Frank and Zlata Filipović mentioned by Cunningham are, however, rare (Cunningham, 1995, p.1) and, by their nature, often kept secret. A sermon preached by a ‘boy bishop’ in the sixteenth century, portraying the innocence of youth, was in fact written by an

over time, children have always behaved in very much the same way. Unlike Ariès, Cunningham believes it is possible to identify a 'sentimental' view towards children in the Middle Ages, giving examples of parental concern for the death of their children drawn from the artefacts placed in graves.³⁵ However, answers drawn from archaeological remains can be variable. There could be, for example, different reasons for the presence of the funerary objects (e.g. the customs of different societies, religious differences, or the social and economic positioning of parents). Nevertheless, Cunningham maintains that the emotional effects of children's deaths on their families are the same for each society.³⁶

Of these methods the most promising pathways to locating the voices of children in antiquity are child-centred. However, these views focus mainly on children from the Middle Ages to the present day. In order to understand the experiences and emotions of ancient 'children at all ages' within their family surroundings and society, it is necessary to consider modern scholarship that has concentrated more on the child in antiquity.

1.2 Ancient childhood

Ancient Greek childhood is studied from a variety of disciplines. For example, sociological, historical, art and archaeological perspectives all offer valuable

adult, possibly to portray a sentimental view of children in order to warn against the reality of bad parenthood and infanticide at that time (Cunningham, 2006, pp.27-8).

³⁵ Sofaer-Derevenski comments that a child's life experience and identity remain unexplored and inaccessible if archaeologists define children by their physical remains and the nature and placement of their discovery (Sofaer-Derevenski, 2000, pp.3-4). Crawford and Lewis are uncertain that studying toys that children used in the past can determine how children played questioning whether such artefacts were developed and used by children, or whether they were made by adults specifically to give to children (Crawford & Lewis, 2008, p.12).

³⁶ (Cunningham, 2006, p.21).

information. Contemporary research in this area highlights certain interesting considerations relevant to an analysis of ancient children and childhood within tragedy. Scholars, though, still doubt whether or not it is possible to locate subjective ‘voices’ of ancient children. For example, some consider it essential that there is evidence from children themselves, as well as identifying what is considered the ‘nature’ of the child (i.e. the differences between children and adults which cause them to react differently and think from their own point of view).

Robert Garland accepts that ‘locating’ children in antiquity is difficult because of the lack of evidence for “‘what it was like’ to be a child in ancient Greece”.³⁷ He identifies problems with the lack and type of source material and difficulties with language.³⁸ Mindful of the difficulty of reviewing children through images and facts provided by adults, he believes it only possible to assess, with any confidence, children of wealthy parents. Even so, he believes Athenian society was not child-orientated, nor that there was any sentimental or emotional interest in children until the fourth century BC when toys in graves and iconographic details of items for children appeared. Emotional interest or sentiment, he suggests, is more conducive to parents in a middle class Western society in the twentieth century that became progressively more concerned with the ‘needs’ and well being of children. He concludes that any differences may be, from the modern perspective, only a

³⁷ (Garland, 2003, p.107).

³⁸ (Garland, 2003, p.13).

matter of degree.³⁹ This view he expresses notwithstanding quoting Euripides' *Heracles*, where Heracles remarks that everyone loves their children (*HF*. 638).⁴⁰

Garland's approach to locating the voices of ancient children is part of a broader attempt to situate Greeks at different stages of their lives and is mainly 'socio-historical'. He fixes these periods as definite stages in the development of Greek life from birth to death, but within the chapters he questions the sociological implications of age-classification, how age-structuring can be looked at in different Greek societies, the demographic implications and the terms associated with children and the consequences of class and sex.⁴¹ Although a solid source book, supported by ancient sources and examples from tragedy, Garland admits the evidence "varies greatly in representativeness".⁴²

Mark Golden's approach to ancient children and childhood is also socio-historical and, like Pollock and Cunningham, he suggests childhood is not a 'modern invention' and that parents in any society 'care' when their children die.⁴³ Here Golden argues against, for instance, Stone who believes demography governs emotional responses to the caring for children in pre-industrial populations.⁴⁴ Golden concludes that any one factor cannot in itself provide an answer and, although much evidence appears to point the other way (e.g. the lack of any surveys), he assumes

³⁹ (Garland, 2003, pp.161-2). Examples of Western society's 'sentimental' interest in children include: children's rights; anxieties about paedophilia; and focus on children's welfare benefits.

⁴⁰ (Garland, 2003, p.162).

⁴¹ (Garland, 2003, p.16).

⁴² (Garland, 2003, p.15).

⁴³ This idea is a revised version of Golden's 'Did the Ancients Care when their Children Died?' (M. Golden, 1988).

⁴⁴ (Stone, 1977, pp.651-2).

that ancient parents were concerned when their children died.⁴⁵ He does not accept the argument that parents had little incentive to become emotionally attached to their young children in an ancient society with a high mortality rate.⁴⁶ Instead, by highlighting the child's perspective and disregarding any change over time, Golden hopes to 'reach' closer to children from Classical Athens. His views support a more emotional and caring approach from parents towards their children and go a long way to revealing the experiences of ancient children by, as he says, "focusing on what children actually did".⁴⁷

Similarly, Golden focuses on a broad collection of ancient evidence to support his view. He cites Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, where Iphis says, "for I saw others having children and began to desire them for myself and waste away with longing" (*Supp.* 1087-88), as an example of intense need for children. In his desire to outline an emotional environment of the ancient Greek household, Golden forms many connections between Greek drama and Athenian society. Indeed, he remarks "Euripides' characters can be quoted as evidence for almost every attitude".⁴⁸ Although this expresses the remoteness of the period it also highlights the potential for focusing on tragedy as a source of evidence, and as a place for exploration of Athenian concerns for their children. Tragedy is not 'realist drama' and therefore is problematic as a source. What is valuable is the way that relationships are formed.

⁴⁵ (M. Golden, 1993, pp.88-90).

⁴⁶ (M. Golden, 1993, pp.86-8). This is despite the practice of child exposure in ancient society. See Boswell for a comprehensive analysis of the evidence for abandonment in ancient Greek and Roman times (Boswell, 1988).

⁴⁷ (M. Golden, 1993, p.xv).

⁴⁸ (M. Golden, 1993, p.90).

Golden uses many examples from Greek drama to portray what parents were prepared to do for their children. For instance, to support the link between parents and their children, he quotes Aristophanes' *The Clouds* where Strepsiades, moaning about his ungrateful son Pheidippides, reminds him of all that he has done for him since he was a baby (*Nub.* 1380-6).⁴⁹ Golden also considers ancient sources such as Plato's *Lysis*, selecting a passage to highlight the value of a son to his father (*Lys.* 219.d).

Other socio-historical studies on ancient children and their childhood provide a constructive background to the family in ancient Greece. W.K. Lacey⁵⁰, Sarah Pomeroy⁵¹ and Cynthia Patterson⁵² all concentrate on the family and household in ancient Greece, its place in the city-state and its relationship to marriage and the place of women. Here children are seen only as part of the family structure. Patterson, in particular, emphasises the importance of the family role in the "historical development of the Greek *polis*".⁵³ She uses literary evidence to look at the *oikos* in relation to the *genos* and its relationship and partnership to the *polis*,⁵⁴ suggesting the *oikos*, not the *genos*, is the important centre of Greek family life.⁵⁵ She defines the Greek terms in a way that leads her to believe that the family structure is not the same as family sentiment: 'structure' describing the household

⁴⁹ Conflict between an older man and a younger man is also found in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* (*Thesm.* 157-72).

⁵⁰ (Lacey, 1968).

⁵¹ (Pomeroy, 1997).

⁵² (Patterson, 1998).

⁵³ (Patterson, 1998, p.2).

⁵⁴ (Patterson, 1998, p.69).

⁵⁵ (Patterson, 1998, p.47).

members and the hierarchy that pertains between them; and sentiment pointing to the personal relationships and understandings within this structure. Although descriptions of the experiences of ancient children do not feature in their work the studies of Lacey, Pomeroy and Patterson form a useful background against which childhood can be framed.

In contrast to the above sociological studies, this thesis, taking into account the background to the ancient child, investigates the lives of dramatic children within the family environment. However, any attempt to resolve the problems of finding a link between the actions on the fifth century BC stage and Athenian society needs to acknowledge the time-bound nature of modern perspectives on antiquity. It must also take into account how change over time can affect what are thought of, often naively, as ‘universal’ values that are held to have continued unchanged.

Golden, concerned about change over time in respect of childhood (i.e. how the concept of childhood can change according to the cultural and social environment),⁵⁶ deals with this question by analysing the different attitudes towards children expressed by Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Polybius.⁵⁷ He assesses the incidence and function of the Greek words for children used by ancient historians and concludes there is no difference over time and genre between the literary authors in the Classical period and Polybius in the Hellenistic period.⁵⁸ Golden also contests evidence that suggests parents in the Hellenistic period had a

⁵⁶ (M. Golden, 1997, pp.176-80).

⁵⁷ However, as elite male writers their objective was to record history and any direct experience of family life was limited or non-existent (although Xenophon had two sons (*OCD*)).

⁵⁸ M. Golden suggests Polybius was following Thucydides and Xenophon, that all three were “more prone to use them [children] to arouse pathos”, and that there was an overlap of experience between all four ancient writers (M. Golden, 1997, p.190).

more sentimental approach towards children than parents in the Classical period.⁵⁹ He suggests this is because of the effect of the style and methods of history utilised by Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Polybius, and warns against the supposition that sentiment towards children characterises the Hellenistic period.⁶⁰ Instead, Golden maintains that sentiment was a matter of “emphasis and degree”⁶¹ between the two periods and not a clear-cut division, and that the assumption of change is the result of discontinuity in the evidence.

Golden’s methodology, using the ‘known’ evidence, although adding to a more complete history and a fuller range of information, might not, he suggests, always give a complete picture of ancient children. As a social historian Golden investigates continuity and/or change within the ancient family from “a related genre, namely history”.⁶² This approach does not, however, give the kind of insight, into the lives of ancient children that an analysis of children’s roles in drama can reveal. A much fuller portrayal can be found through the tensions and conflicts portrayed by the playwrights in which children become subjects in the dramatic energy of the plays and not simply objects under scrutiny.

History and its record of the past provide further consideration. Robert Parker, the historian of ancient Greece, looks at a range of topics dealing with Greek religion in Athens (e.g. festivals, cults and ritual roles of boys and girls).⁶³ The historical data amassed by Parker underline the importance of a study of the role of

⁵⁹ (M. Golden, 1997, p.178).

⁶⁰ (M. Golden, 1997, p.191).

⁶¹ (M. Golden, 1997, p.179).

⁶² (M. Golden, 1997, p.181).

⁶³ (Parker, 2007).

children in Greek tragedy and its implications for Athenian society. His work is based on sociological, religious, anthropological and historical evidence, and details both ancient sources as well as modern scholarship. Parker deals with events and any 'apparent' lack of evidence or continuity and/or change in a constructive manner. Using the evidence that exists and important thematic strands, his work, therefore, provides useful judgements based on historical sources and can form a background to the lives and public roles of ancient children. It also gives an insight into the lives of Athenian citizens, the family in the household and the audiences that received the plays.

Modern scholarship also uses ancient visual representations of children and childhood to investigate how children in different roles and from different cultures, were treated by their parents.⁶⁴ The emphasis, in this case, is on the 'universality' of childhood and the 'voices' of ancient children. This brings the children to the forefront as opposed to children being part of the family and society. Jenifer Neils and John Oakley discuss the wide gap between modern understanding of ancient children's lives and the actual lives of those children; the way children were raised, their activities, and their religious and ceremonial rites are all vulnerable to this difficulty. However, they believe that by looking at similarities and differences between the past and the present, it is reasonable to conclude that children in antiquity (as with today's children) had important and significant influences on their society.⁶⁵ They consider the ancient evidence and ask "questions from a contemporary perspective"⁶⁶ on the understanding that the sources are often

⁶⁴ For example, (Neils & Oakley, 2003) (Cohen & Rutter, 2007) and (Taplin, 2007).

⁶⁵ (Neils & Oakley, 2003, pp.1-4).

⁶⁶ (Neils & Oakley, 2003, p.3).

unreliable and that there is no “subjective experience of childhood” available.⁶⁷ This appealing argument points a way back to the past by plotting a course from the present to the past, looking at comparisons and variations in basic common human behaviours within family life.

Lesley Beaumont suggests that a gradual change in perspective towards children occurred in iconography in the fifth century BC. She says that children in this period are portrayed more often at different stages of development and are involved in the activities of childhood in family group situations.⁶⁸ There is some parallel here with the children in tragedy being portrayed as important members of the family group. Beaumont’s conjecture on the more naturalistic visual representations of children in the fifth century (a result of a change in attitude and a general increase in the status of the Athenians, and on the decrease of mythical representations of children on pots) offers a constructive addition to the ideas of Neils and Oakley. Beaumont also points to a possible link between images of ancient children and the sociological and political changes at this time, cautioning, however, that attitudes of a society can change over just a hundred years.

Oliver Taplin’s study of the interaction between the mythological scenes on funeral vases and Greek tragedy considers how the two art forms — the tragic scenes on the vase-paintings and the tragic action on stage — can throw light on each other and on continuity between the past and the present.⁶⁹ Taplin explains the importance of the experience of tragedy in fourth century BC in Western Greece and its dissemination from fifth century BC Athens. According to Taplin, the reason for

⁶⁷ (Neils & Oakley, 2003, p.2).

⁶⁸ (Beaumont, 2003, pp.68-9).

⁶⁹ (Taplin, 2007, p.2).

tragedy's longevity is that both mythology and the tragedies offer ingredients of human 'universality' — the range of unchanging human emotions such as grief, fear and love. Such emotions, for example Heracles' grief and remorse when he realises he has killed his three sons and wife in a murderous frenzy, can be 'experienced' by an audience from the safety of their seats. Taplin suggests this is one reason why Athenian tragedy spread quickly to the rest of the Greek world and, despite the inevitable cultural and temporal gap, how it still appeals to audiences today.

Taplin discusses a number of vase-paintings portraying children with their parents in mythological scenes that show the exaggeration and exploitation of already dramatic tales of human importance.⁷⁰ He believes, "two kinds of narrative are, perhaps, particularly 'tragic'. One is intrafamily killing, deliberate or in ignorance, intended or fulfilled".⁷¹ Even if the vases do not relate directly to tragic performances, the role of the child in its tragic *pathos* and the portrayal of unconventional behaviour (e.g. the murder of their own children by Medea, Agaue and Heracles) that is depicted on the vases focuses attention on the discourse of social order.

Considering the significant studies on the history of childhood and ancient childhood, the methodological approach of James and Prout⁷² — one that establishes

⁷⁰ Taplin's titles (e.g. "quite possibly related to", "plausibly related to", "more than likely related to", "may well be related to") for particular pots suggest that he thinks it cannot be said with any certainty that the pots *are* related to the plays. Yet, a receiver's knowledge of the plays may well inform and enhance an appreciation of the paintings (Taplin, 2007, pp.25-6) without it being a portrayal of an actual performance (Taplin, 2007, p.35). For example, the Lucanian calyx-krater, ca. 400 attributed to Policoro Painter, may not be a 'programme' for Euripides' *Medea* (the children's bodies are on an altar not with Medea) yet it is "veined with the sparks of the imaginative and transformative fire that tragedy contains within its very being" (Lada-Richards, 2009, p.103).

⁷¹ (Taplin, 2007, p.41).

⁷² (James & Prout, 1990).

children in their own particular society and also recognises children as crucial within their own families and society (free of adult perspectives) — has some relevance to the study of children in Greek tragedy. James and Prout's suggestion, however, that taking into account class, gender, and ethnicity, may prove useful for finding the voices of children in their own society does not necessarily provide a useful approach for research into the experiences of ancient children. The child-centred studies of Cunningham⁷³, Pollock⁷⁴ and Ozment⁷⁵ offer more here in their analysis of where children are situated in the family and the activities that affect their lives within the family environment.

Interpretative methods of continuity (as in Cunningham, Ozment and Pollock) may indeed help discover the experiences of children in the past. Continuity, though, can easily be lost sight of or disguised by change and this can result in the mere appearance of continuity. Locating the voices of children is undoubtedly problematic. Before considering personal voices there is a need to consider what children experience in tragedy and how this is presented. This is signposted through the focalisation of the characters and the retrieval of children's voices through an analysis of the dramatic structure. Drama highlights the emotional elements and the ways in which it was constructed. Locating the voices of children can, though, be assessed in important ways through a wider social and historical examination of the society including, most significantly, the evidence of tragedy.

⁷³ (Cunningham, 2006).

⁷⁴ (Pollock, 1983).

⁷⁵ (Ozment, 2001).

Of the studies on ancient children and childhood, Garland,⁷⁶ Golden⁷⁷ and Lacey⁷⁸ consider the lack of personal voices for children in antiquity and also the lack of reliable evidence available. Golden, for example, says that it is hard to understand what children felt and that modern scholarship tends to focus on what parents and adults thought.⁷⁹ This may reveal more about the parents than the children, and fails to highlight any emotional elements. Certainly, lack of evidence in general means the whole picture remains elusive. Quantitative methods such as Stone's are of little help in establishing the nature of personal relationships. Drama, on the other hand, enables an examination of these types of questions in more detail.

Alongside a sociological approach can be placed an historical perspective of children in ancient Greece and their role in the family and social environment. A sociological approach that considers the interactions and relationships of people, together with historical studies that deal with the events and analyse the developments in the past, may achieve this balance. Historical perspectives make judgements based on historical sources and can only suggest possibilities for the subjective experiences of children. Sociological perspectives are drawn more from a contemporary viewpoint, attempting to judge the make-up or behaviour of another society extrapolated from the viewer's viewpoint. This offers an acute case of the relationship between modern concepts and perspectives and those that can be extrapolated from the ancient evidence. The potential clarity of this 'lens', however, can too readily become the mixed up fragments of a kaleidoscope. It is difficult to

⁷⁶ (Garland, 2003).

⁷⁷ (M. Golden, 1993).

⁷⁸ (Lacey, 1968).

⁷⁹ (M. Golden, , p.2).

see clearly how Greek drama sits on the historical/sociological spectrum. For example, Aeschylus' *The Persians* is an important but imprecise historical record of the battle of Salamis⁸⁰ yet it also portrays the fears of a mother and the relationship between a father and his arrogant son.

Continuity in respect of unchanging human emotional values, even though societies and their values do change, is an important (and unavoidable) evaluative process that can shape any contemporary view of children in the past. As far as it can, continuity 'pushes' through the changes over time and provides a way of analysing childhood and children in the past. It offers a 'connection' with 'pastness' and gets over at least some of the problems associated with trying to identify with past behaviour in different cultures or societies. On the other hand, searching for the subjective voices of ancient children, as a tangible and identifiable part of the historic past, presents many more difficulties. Continuity can meaningfully highlight the potential contribution that knowledge of the ancient Greek world can make to the understanding of the contemporary world and its temporal and spatial situation. Golden⁸¹, Neils and Oakley⁸² and Taplin⁸³ all support the need to take into account the patterns of continuity and/or change within the ancient and contemporary societies. However, continuity approaches come with warnings; each society on the continuum may have, for example, different laws, values and principles. Analysing any continuity and/or change in cultural systems (or even basic universal human behaviour due to the cultural demands of a society) runs the risk of reconstructing or

⁸⁰ See (Hdt. VIII.78-98).

⁸¹ (M. Golden, 1997).

⁸² (Neils & Oakley, 2003).

⁸³ (Taplin, 2007).

even inventing the emotions of the parent and child relationship. As long as these warnings are heeded and an appropriate ‘thread’ of continuity is used — here the evidence of tragic drama — continuity offers the most positive and constructive approach available at present.

‘Ancient sources’ were part of the playwrights’ world. In the modern world it is necessary to review these sources in respect of children in the ancient family (both human and divine) in order to see how they fit in and the reasons why they were used and adapted in the tragedies. Such sources (subject always to the bias of the writer) cannot document the entirety of family life nor, in translation, which mentally involves an element of interpretation, can such sources be entirely reliable. However, fifth century Athenians had a rich heritage of epic literature depicting stories about the gods. These stories were part of the Greeks’ history and had considerable influence on their moral and ethical code.

The narrative epic poetry of Homer and Hesiod, in different ways, traces the genealogy and behaviour of the gods and the known gods of cult that directed their world. Epic poetry — the genesis of Greek mythology — was the essence of Greek religion, and served as important source material for the playwrights. In particular, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, a systemised theology on the ancestry of the gods and creation myth (with hardly any mention of humans) relates stories not just about the pedigree of the gods from the beginning to Zeus’ ultimate dominance, but also their family relationships and family disputes. It traces the procreation of the families of the gods and, as the gods are immortal and therefore their children do not outlive their parents, there is a continual family line that exists without the normal destructive conventions of time. In the foundation myths the family of the gods manifested many problems. Starting with Chasm and then concentrating on Earth (Gaia), the first destructive

action of a child (Cronus), supported by his mother (Earth) is planned against his father (Uranus) (*Theog.* 126-83). This first act of revenge is motivated by the mutual hatred between parent and child (this has some similarity to the tragedies that portray the story of Electra and Orestes).⁸⁴ The story of Cronus, urged by his mother to castrate his father Uranus (with some similarity of brutality with the tearing of body parts Agaue inflicted on Pentheus), identifies a brutal action that causes a destabilizing change in the cosmos. In this way the *Theogony* sees the cosmos as the result of “genealogical evolution” that it realises under the guidance of Zeus.⁸⁵

In *Works and Days* (an offering of advice to humans), Hesiod recommends hard work, and gives guidance on human behaviour under the ordering of Zeus.⁸⁶ His stories here are about farmers and sailors and how they should lead their lives. Their problems — such as women and marriage, inheritance, old age and illness — are explained by contrasting them with the behaviour of the gods. The history of the gods and their behaviour in the *Theogony*, therefore, represents “the kinds of conflicts and resolutions familiar to human domestic and political history”.⁸⁷ Both the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* highlight divine and human families and their struggles with intra-family relationships.

⁸⁴ Clay believes this suggests a pattern emerging of a “generative principle, identified with the female” which has the effect of undermining the cosmos (Clay, 2003, p.17).

⁸⁵ (Clay, 2003, p.13). Allan says, Homer and Hesiod’s “depiction of the gods, and in particular of Zeus as the focal point of cosmic order and justice (both human and divine), proved to be a remarkably enduring and productive model for making sense of the world” (Allan, 2006, p.33).

⁸⁶ Clay believes the two books complement each other. She suggests the *Theogony* is similar to a hymn while the *Works and Days* is like a prayer, each mirroring the other in “the divine and human perspective” (Clay, 2003, p.11).

⁸⁷ (Most, 2006, p.xxxi).

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are longer narrative poems which, as well as describing the gods' behaviour, looks at human action and how it is governed by the gods. Although both Hesiod and Homer have shared themes there are crucial differences — their approach to Zeus and his omniscience, for example.⁸⁸ In the stories of Homer there is some reassurance to humans when they realise that even the gods have their own family quarrels and distressing times. In the *Iliad*, Zeus sees his son Sarpedon about to be killed by Patroclus and wonders if he should use his power to rescue the child whose mother is a human. Hera persuades him not to and Zeus agrees, but his distress and grief seems the same as any parent, human or divine, whose child dies (*Il.* XVI.432-58). Even though there is some reliance on the gods for consolation, Homer reminds humans of their own responsibilities and that they should not blame the gods every time something goes wrong. In the *Odyssey* Zeus says, "Look you now, how ready mortals are to blame the gods. It is from us, they say, that evils come, but they even of themselves, through their own blind folly, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained" (*Od.* I.33-4). Throughout Greek tragedy the playwrights portray the balance of power and responsibility between gods and humans.

Louise Pratt refers to the reassurance made available in Homer in her investigation of the parent-child relationship in the *Iliad*. She suggests that parents who had lost a child might have found comfort in the theme of parental devotion in

⁸⁸ Hesiod, writing about marriage and mentioning Prometheus, says Zeus is impossible to deceive (*Theog.* 613-6). In the *Iliad*, Zeus is deceived by his wife, Hera. She casts 'Sleep' (Hypnos, the son of Night who was called "deadly" by Hesiod (*Theog.* 224)) on Zeus and while he is asleep she tells Poseidon to help the Greeks against Zeus' order not to give aid (*Il.* XIV.196-350). Nevertheless, for both Homer and Hesiod, Zeus is the 'king' of the Olympian gods, and the ultimate authority in any conflict between the lesser gods.

the *Iliad*.⁸⁹ Pratt highlights the powerful emotional bond between Hector and Andromache and Astyanax, and how this is demonstrated when Hector leaves them to return to battle (*Il.* VI.400-500), and the despair of Priam and Hecuba when they see their son Hector killed by Achilles (*Il.* XXII.405-35). The depth of parental concern for children and the desire for the continuation of their children is apparent in these examples. Although there are difficulties when trying to gain quantitative evidence about people's emotions and feelings, and always the distance between 'now' and 'then', Pratt's view suggests that the *Iliad* offered examples of parental care for children that was "the noble, and even the natural, activity of parents".⁹⁰ This is not withstanding Hesiod's depiction of bad conduct manifest in divine families.

Greek tragedy galvanised these ideas of family disputes and killings from epic poetry and put them on the stage "under rigorous, polemical, violent and *public* scrutiny".⁹¹ The relationship between Athenian citizens and gods in the plays allowed the audience to connect their newly forming civic community with their mythical past. The plays, no matter how contentious in their social, religious and political framework, were always exposed to analysis, and in the agonistic context, the judgement of the audience. The playwrights shaped the myths and stories of Homer and Hesiod to appeal to the widest possible Athenian audience recreating the old world for the new world of the emerging democracy. By these means, playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides facilitated (at least in part)

⁸⁹ (Pratt, 2007, p.40).

⁹⁰ (Pratt, 2007).

⁹¹ (Goldhill, 2004, p.16).

the development or otherwise of religion in the fifth century BC by the re-telling of myths and stories in their plays.⁹²

There is an undeniably religious influence in tragedy, both explicit and implicit. Gods are characters in the plays that influenced and orchestrated human actions, and tragedy is intertwined with social and religious rituals such as libations and sacrifice. However, the gods are not always portrayed as guiding humans towards a better life. There are many instances in the plays where humans question the authority and wisdom of the gods. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, for example, the Chorus has misgivings about the omniscience of Zeus when they say, "Zeus, whosoe'er he be," (*Ag.* 160).⁹³ Such questioning pre-figures a transition of power, at least in part, from gods to humans and how, with this new power of choice over their own actions, humans can move (although still guided by Zeus) towards a greater sense of wisdom through suffering (*Ag.* 178). Euripides takes this idea further in *The Trojan Women*, when Hecuba says, "so the gods amounted to nothing after all!" (*Tro.* 1240).⁹⁴ A concept of Greek tragedy that fits with religious ideas or with ideas about what 'reality' is, can also be seen as a straightforward examination of the philosophy of suffering and its causes.⁹⁵ In the tragedies this is seen especially through the suffering of children, at all ages.

⁹² Parker says, "tragedy in particular, could scarcely avoid having a profound influence on Athenian religious perception" (Parker, 2007, p.140).

⁹³ Sourvinou-Inwood suggests the *Agamemnon* is "seen from a human perspective" where "access to the divine is only through prophecy" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003, p.241).

⁹⁴ In some modern performances of Greek tragedy such as Cacoyannis' film *Trojan Women*, the gods have been removed, and at the end of Sartre's *Les Troyennes*, Poseidon disdains humans and warns of their destruction (Hall, 2007, pp.24-5).

⁹⁵ (Hall, 2007, p.18).

1.3 Children in tragedy

The importance of children in tragedy as pivotal indicators for the actions of the main characters is discussed by, for example, M. Dyson and K.H. Lee whose study of the funeral of Astyanax in Euripides' *The Trojan Woman* describes the suffering of Andromache and Hecuba when Astyanax is killed.⁹⁶ T.A. Tarkow's study of the parent-child relationship in *Hecuba* focuses on the strength of the relationship between Hecuba and Polyxena as being crucial to the development of the play.⁹⁷ Emma Griffiths concentrates on the "embodied identity of the child as staged"⁹⁸ believing that, notwithstanding what she identifies as the low incidence of children in tragedy, they are as important as adult characters. The influential article by G.M. Sifakis highlights this importance giving instances of young children in Greek drama, their speaking and non-speaking parts and providing a valuable discussion on the presence of child actors.⁹⁹ Such examples of modern scholarship are relevant to the study of children generally in tragedy and point to an ever increasing importance of tragic children being noteworthy subjects to be studied in their own right. Their central role raises important questions about how the tragedies were received and might have conditioned the audiences' responses at a time when the society was

⁹⁶ (Dyson & Lee, 2000).

⁹⁷ Tarkow suggests, "parent-child relationships are instead part of the human fabric of the play" (Tarkow, 1984, p.131). It is possible reassurance that such a stalwart relationship between parent and child can exist is of particular interest to those in the audience whose relationships with their own children are strained. See Strauss for conflict between father and son in fifth century BC Athens (Strauss, 1993, pp.100-4).

⁹⁸ (Griffiths, forthcoming, p.3).

⁹⁹ (Sifakis, 1979).

placing more importance on the family, and when “a citizen’s family life was a component of his political identity”.¹⁰⁰

As with all dramatic characters, tragic children on stage have to ‘come alive’ in order for the play to work. There is no direct evidence to suggest child actors took the parts of children in tragic plays, although children were part of acting families and the theatre would be an ideal training ground for these children to learn how to become actors.¹⁰¹ According to Aristotle’s *Poetics* the number of speaking actors at any one time on stage in fifth century BC was three (*Poet.* 1449a.2-25).¹⁰² Therefore, the absence of a ‘voice’ for children in Greek tragedy is very often a given — the so-called ‘three-actor rule’ (an innovation of Sophocles) only allows three adult actors speaking parts.¹⁰³ Yet, there are some instances when children, on stage, have small speaking or singing parts. In these cases the three-actor rule still applies. When Eumelus sings his lament for his mother in *Alcestis* (*Alc.* 393-401) the main characters on stage are his father Admetus and his mother Alcestis. In *Andromache* only Andromache and Menelaus are on stage when Molossos sings (*Andr.* 504-36).

¹⁰⁰ (Hall, 1997, p.104).

¹⁰¹ In theatrical families skills were passed on from one generation to the next — helping out as assistants, stagehands or when required working as walk-on non-speaking parts (Sifakis, 1979, p.76). Euripides’ son (or nephew) Euripides the Younger, an actor and poet himself, produced *Iphigenia in Aulis* after Euripides’ death. Aeschylus’ two sons were prominent tragedians in their adult life. One of his sons Euphorion won first prize in 431 BC over both Sophocles and Euripides, and Aeschylus’ nephew Philocles produced over a hundred tragedies, one that was more successful than Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*OCD*).

¹⁰² Aristotle’s *Poetics* was written c. 330 BC (Csapo & Slater, 1995, p.99). It cannot be assumed to be direct evidence of theatre practice in fifth century BC although it seems evident from the tragedies that Aeschylus introduced a second actor and Sophocles a third (Walton, 1991, p.143). Walton suggests there were only three main actors because it was too costly for the state to pay out prize money to more than three (Walton, 1991, p.143).

¹⁰³ Stevens says, “apparently one or more children could be brought in as extras, with small speaking (singing) parts” (Stevens, 1971, p.159). Sifakis also suggests, “children must have been represented on the stage by children” (Sifakis, 1979, p.73). One reason he gives is that adult actors would be the wrong size (unless very short) and so they would look wrong for the audience.

For non-speaking parts it is possible that young children and young adults from theatrical families were on stage alongside the three main characters as supporting characters as this would not break the three-actor rule. For example, in *Andromache* at line 546 when Andromache's son Molossos is still on stage so is his mother, Menelaus and Peleus.

Credibility is essential for drama — an audience can only suspend their disbelief if they believe in what is being portrayed, and suspension of disbelief is essential for dramatic success. The actors portrayed as children in the plays, whether young actors or not, must have resembled in some realistic sense children in order for the audience to identify them credibly as such.¹⁰⁴ For the actions and words of children's characters to be convincing to an audience it is plausible that child actors, at least of an appropriate age and size, were used.¹⁰⁵ It would be (at least superficially) less convincing, for example, if the size of Molossos was similar or larger than the actor playing his mother, Andromache, especially when Molossos enters holding onto his mother (*Andr.* 404).

There are also indications in the language and performance of the plays that convincingly mark out children from adults. For example, in Euripides' *Alcestis*, Alcestis' child says, "It's me, mother, your little one, who is calling on you and falling on your lips with kisses" (*Alc.* 399-401). Heracles' son says, "Do not kill me,

¹⁰⁴ This applies to any dramatic form. Even if it departs from visual credibility (e.g. puppets, cartoons) the characterisations must be credible. The Foursight Theatre uses puppets effectively to portray children in their productions of *Hecuba* (Polymestor's sons), *Medea* (Medea's two sons) and *Agamemnon* (Iphigenia and Cassandra). See Hardwick's review on Foursight's approach to using puppets in *Agamemnon* <http://www.foursight.theatre.boltblue.net/news4.htm>, accessed 06/09/2006.

¹⁰⁵ On the vase which Taplin considers to be closely related to Sophocles' *Oedipus (the King)* the presence of Oedipus' two daughters portrayed smaller than the adults "adds an extra emotional twinge to the scene" (Taplin, 2007, p.92). It is possible the *pathos* is enhanced because the girls seem to be on stage at the point when the Messenger is explaining that Oedipus is the child of Jocasta and Laius and his daughters are, therefore, also his sisters.

my dearest father ... I belong to you, I am your son" (*HF*. 987-9). Polyxena having just found out she is to be sacrificed tells her mother that "It is for you, mother, hapless one, I weep my lament all of tears" (*Hec*. 211-12). These words portray a need for parental protection and a poignancy that can only be achieved through the credible portrayal of child characters.

Whether the actors representing child characters sang or spoke themselves is unknown. If they were child actors it is possible an actor on stage, or someone off stage, spoke or sang their words for them. However, children's voices, especially young boys', can project as successfully as the voice of an adult actor's. In the Great Dionysia in Athens dithyrambic choruses consisting of fifty boys took part in singing and dancing "a poetic composition"¹⁰⁶ to honour the god Dionysus. It is, therefore, conceivable that one of these boys could be on stage and sing Molossos' lament (*Andr*. 504-36), or for some to take part in the boys' chorus in *Suppliant Women* (*Supp*. 1123-62).¹⁰⁷ The voices of young boys singing in the chorus would be even more poignant to an audience aware of Athenian war orphans sitting in the front row of the theatre.¹⁰⁸ Also, in the Thargelia on the second day, when "good things" occurred five choruses of boys all deemed to be the city's most excellent boys, the "fairest and finest", took part in competition.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the number of young Athenian boys taking part in choral competitions, over a number of years, must have

¹⁰⁶ (Easterling, 1997b, p.37).

¹⁰⁷ Sifakis cites Dale who says the chorus of boys in *Suppliant Women* could have included boys from a choir of boys (Sifakis, 1979, p.73).

¹⁰⁸ (Morwood, 2007, p.231). The war orphans were looked after by the city acting in a parental role to honour the dead soldiers (Loraux, 2006, pp.56-7).

¹⁰⁹ (Wilson, 2007, p.152). On the significant roles of boys and possible rites of passage in the Thargelia, Pyanopsia and Oschophoria see also Parker (Parker, 2007, pp.204-17).

been high. It was part of their education and for wealthier families the presence of their sons in a chorus was beneficial.¹¹⁰ Their presence indicates their importance and also their position as part of a civic identity in which all members, young and old, form a coherent whole.¹¹¹

Children are important components of the tragic plot — believable both as actors and characters. The physical presence of child characters on stage and the adult's interactions with them, combined with the 'voices' of many children, young and on the threshold of adulthood in the plays, provides plenty of examples for the audience about the prominence of children within the Greek *oikos* and for their role in the *polis*.

Children in tragedy exist in family environments riven by power struggles and motivated by external human and divine forces. In all cases emotional suffering ensues. For example, in Euripides' *Alcestis*, the children of Alcestis face the death of their mother; in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Hyllus' mother kills herself and Hyllus has to bury his father, Heracles; in Sophocles' *Ajax*, Eurysaces is also faced with the death of his father as are Antigone and Ismene when, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, their father dies. These children face an uncertain future, which because of their membership of the aristocracy is often politically motivated. Nevertheless, even though they suffer through the deaths of their parents, they do not lose their lives. It is the killing or planned killing of children, and the killing or planned killing by children of their parents, that evokes the most impact and *pathos*.

¹¹⁰ (Wilson, 2000, p.75).

¹¹¹ Athenian young girls approaching marriageable age were part of ritual processions at festivals. The Chorus in Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* defines four religious roles for young girls (*Lys.* 639-50). This evidence and the roles of girls is discussed in detail by Parker (Parker, 2007, pp.218-48).

Child killing is not a separate element within Greek tragedy; it is integral and crucial to the plot and needs to be discussed as central to the dramatic structure and the ethical debates within the plays. The killing of children is particularly problematic — it pits the powerful against the most vulnerable and defenceless and so raises cruelty to the highest level. Children are both used and abused. Medea, for example, abused by being abandoned in a foreign country by Jason, abuses her own children; Agamemnon uses his daughter to gain political power; and Theseus abuses Hippolytus by sending him into exile and certain death. Because of its nature, child killing takes human motivation, wrongdoing and destructive power to extremes. The specific cruelty associated with the victim's vulnerability brings out features of tragedy inaccessible by other means. Child killing as a sacrifice, portrayed in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Hecuba*, *The Children of Heracles*, *Phoenician Women* and *Erechtheus*, draws on the needs or demands of divine authority. This extends the impetus of the more powerful and driven killer beyond what might be considered the range of human motivation. Sometimes this shifts the weight of responsibility, but the outcomes of remorse and regret always remain squarely with the humans responsible for the acts they carry out. However, this mixture of motivation, influence and responsibility for outcomes gives rise to a new and surprising freedom — the possibility of moral integrity for humans outside the scope of divine influence.

Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *Ion* and *Andromache* show different degrees of divine and human involvement in the anticipated killing, attempted murder and killing of children. Plans to kill, whether or not fulfilled — the 'murderous intention' — are properly included in any analysis of family killing or attempted family killing. These amplify psychological factors and family tensions involved in the build-up to

murder, factors that can often be hidden by the killing itself. Revealing these to scrutiny highlights, in ways otherwise unavailable, the balance of power and the accepted hierarchical structure that generally exists between humans and gods.

With the exception of Medea, no killing within the family environment goes without penalty. Often such actions, either in support of horizontal alliances made to commit them or already in existence, can lead to the destruction of the vertical family structure. Horizontal alliances are relationships usually built around love, need, and dependence. For example, siblings Electra and Orestes need and depend on each other to commit matricide.¹¹² The vertical family structure consists of parents or a parent and their children such as Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and their children Iphigenia, Electra, Chrysothemis and Orestes. This family structure is based on family kinship and although sometimes involving love, need and dependency none of these relational qualities is necessary for the vertical family structure to exist.¹¹³ Even without the external motivations that may rationalise sacrifice, parents can be driven by various reasons and forces to take the lives of their own children, just as children can be led to kill their parents. The consequences of such actions can be made not only in the destruction of the family fabric but in madness, mental disarray and the depths of remorse. Furthermore, anticipation of murder brings about great inner conflict for those so driven. The usual subordination of humans to divine power is not only tested and strained but also in some cases overturned.

¹¹² Ancient sources show close relationships between siblings were known to have existed (Plut. *Vit. Cim.* 4.14).

¹¹³ This has a parallel with Athenian family units that consisted of “direct linear ancestors” and a possible “line of future descendants” (Ober, 1989, p.56). The “emphasis on intergenerational transmission” for passing on wealth and educating future citizens highlights the importance of the vertical family structure (Strauss, 1993, p.34).

Extreme acts such as these portray human characters struggling in the face of divine and conflicting political forces and moral codes — balancing the influences of a strong Homeric and Hesiodic tradition with the expectations and hope of the *oikos* and its place in society. In the tragedies, the emerging social morality of the *oikos* is set alongside the authority of the divine world of Olympus, always present and threatening to interfere with the family. In this arena, vulnerable children are used and abused, and their parent or parents are seen to be defenceless against the presence and interference of the gods. Throughout these plays there is an indication that the worst crimes, or anticipation of them, brings out the most intense emotions. A compensatory solution of sorts is reached in *Andromache* when it is revealed that humans can, even under the greatest distress, organise their lives as they find empowerment free from the gods. Divine forces, though, provide no safe haven or moral equilibrium. Indeed it is only when the gods are not present to manipulate events that the family finds its true strength and survives.

Using the ‘dramatic’ family as representative of a loving (as well as important) social framework, the portrayal of family breakdown and the collapse of the inherent and fundamental vertical structure provides a powerful architecture against which the limits of moral responsibility are tested. Using this touchstone the playwrights are able to explore the structure of human psychology and its limits of sanity as well as putting the frailty of human life against the wishes and influences of the ever-present supernatural divinities. Here, an exploration of the use and abuse of children reveals them as central to the depiction of the tensions between humans and the divine. There are both analytic and conceptual problems involved in placing children in Greek tragedy; and these difficulties continually run together.

Through the extreme acts of violence towards and by children, tragedy “confronts, questions (and only very occasionally affirms) the social, moral, political and ideological discourse of its audience”.¹¹⁴ This confrontation and inquiry has particular resonance in the chapters chosen for this thesis. The chapter ‘Sacrificial Children’ analyses the effects that the socially prohibited practice of human sacrifice has on young adults through their voiced opinions, as well as the effects on their families and societies. ‘Parents Killing Children’ continues the topic of children being killed but this time it is as the result of a parent’s mental deviation from the norm. Here, the cost to the family unit is also great —family line and wealth is destroyed and distressing emotions of remorse are experienced. In ‘Children Killing Parents’ the expectation that children should respect and revere their parents is overturned when it is the children who murder their parents whether it be with forethought and planning or not. In these chapters divine intervention is ever present. In the last chapter, ‘Survival Despite the Gods’, it is shown how tragedy can separate the intermingled human and divine forces with important consequences for human autonomy from the gods.

Taking into account recent modern scholarship on the history of childhood and ancient children and childhood, it is evident that the majority of studies combine the historical and social context and use the literary and dramatic sources to underpin their enquiry.¹¹⁵ Using social and historical material to prompt some questions about how children ‘fit’ in the family unit, about their experiences and their subjective

¹¹⁴ (Hesk, 2007, p.75).

¹¹⁵ Ancient literature includes, for example, the work of the historian Thucydides, the social commentaries of Herodotus, the biographies of the historian Plutarch, and epic poetry, though the distinctions between historiography and other ancient literature, now and at the time, are sometimes blurred.

voices, this thesis does the reverse. By its formalised presentation its tragic and comic power, drama reveals itself distinct from history. To all intents and purposes it is literary (i.e. drawing on the tragic narratives) and historical (i.e. supported by evidence used for what is generally considered 'history'), and has implications for some modern scholarship discussed as well as contributing to the wider study of children in antiquity.

2 SACRIFICIAL CHILDREN

ἥδ' ἀντὶ πολλῶν ἐστὶ μοι παραψυχή,
πόλις, τιθήνη, βάκτρον, ἡγεμὼν ὁδοῦ.

She is my consolation in place of many things,
she is my city, nurse, staff, guide upon my way.

(*Hec.* 280-1)

2.1 Introduction

The confrontation in tragedy between prohibited social practices and accepted values is felt most strongly in the depiction of extreme acts against the most vulnerable. The dramatic exploration of the sacrifice of children brings out both these features and provides evidence, in tragedy, for the importance of the voices of children as well as the fundamental role of ever-present divine forces. The portrayal of young adults as sacrificial victims in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Phoenician Women*, *The Children of Heracles* and *Erechtheus* has an important part to play in the depiction of themes of conflict in tragic Greek drama.¹

¹ Although Euripides' *Alcestis* and Sophocles' *Antigone* both forfeit their lives for their families they are outside the group of young adults considered in this chapter as these two women are not offered for "suicidal slaughter" (*Phoen.* 332). *Alcestis* sacrifices her life so her husband can live (*Alc.* 154-5) and *Antigone*, who buried her brother against the wishes of Creon, hangs herself "suspended by a woven noose of fine linen" (*Ant.* 1220-5). *Alcestis* is a married woman who is 'allowed' to die by her husband (*Alc.* 20) and *Antigone* knew she would die if she chose to break the law (*Ant.* 461-2).

Not only are the weakest and most vulnerable members of the family group — Iphigenia, Polyxena, Macaria, Menoeceus and Erechtheus' daughter — selected to take on this crucial dramatic role but they are also portrayed in ways that take their vulnerability to extremes and those extremes to the very limits. Human sacrifice of children in Greek tragedies highlights the tension between the accepted social practice of animal sacrifice (an integral part of religious ritual) and human sacrifice.² In addition the inclusion of the (socially outlawed) practice of human sacrifice in these dramas also entails radical changes to myths that were well established in the minds of Athenians.³ Human sacrifice, therefore, serves as a pressure point in the drama for its contemporary audience by portraying childhood in ways that conflict with the recognised position of children in fifth century BC Athenian society.⁴

Childhood characters in Greek tragedy do not limit or reduce the impact they have nor the crucial position they hold in the tragedies. Indeed, the physical presence of these young adults, and their 'voices',⁵ places them central to the actions of the

² Loraux says young virgins were not sacrificed in Athens at this time (Loraux, 1987, p.33). Hughes finds no archaeological evidence to support the view that human sacrifice took place in fifth century Athens, believing there are still difficulties linking any connections between archaeology and literature (Hughes, 1991, pp.190-3).

³ (Dowden, 1992, p.6). The Greek mythology used by the playwrights was the sum of all the myths known by its audience in different forms (e.g. literature, vase-paintings, sculpture and oral stories).

⁴ Rabinowitz believes the victims are erotic fetishes "glorified" to give men "self-sufficiency" with the effect that, by the willingness of the victim, there is no blame for their perpetrator's actions (Rabinowitz, 1993, p.37). Zeitlin comments on the sacrifice of Iphigenia in the *Agamemnon* as ritual slaughter not murder (Zeitlin, 1965, p.464). Foley sees ritual sacrifices in context of a social crisis and the conflict between humans and the gods (Foley, 1985, p.63). Girard links human sacrifice to violence and believes human sacrifices are substitute members of the community allowing the community no fear of reprisal so saving it from violence (Girard, 2005, p.8). Vidal-Naquet considers hunting and the conflict between civilisation and wild nature (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1981, pp.150-74). Scodel links sacrifice in drama to civic sacrificial practice noting the ornamental presence of virgins at sacrifices and their exploitation by the playwrights (Scodel, 1996, pp.111-28). Loraux sees the willing sacrificial victim as a gift in marriage (Loraux, 1987, pp.37-42).

⁵ Aeschylus' Iphigenia did not appear on stage. Nevertheless, the Chorus' report gives a detailed and emotional description of the sacrifice and that Iphigenia only cried out one word, "father" (*Ag.* 227) as

main characters in the dramas in which they feature. This centrality expresses a dynamic between context and text relevant to the ‘dramatic’ young adults,⁶ and the position of the mainly ‘silent’ Athenian young adults.

In a ‘dramatic’ world largely determined by both natural and divine law, such offerings, violent in their nature, are made for different specific reasons — in the case of Iphigenia and Menoeceus to appease the gods, for Polyxena in response to a supernatural demand and for Macaria and Erechtheus’ daughter in response to oracles. In all cases it is to satisfy a broadly ‘divine’ requirement. Although the sacrifices solve a crisis, it is at an emotional and practical cost to the young adults’ family. With their sacrifice comes parental grief. Practically, the potential has gone for marriage, having children, caring for parents in old age, or, in the case of males specifically, to continue the family name. More broadly, there is a cost for all levels of society — children, considered as investments for their country in time of both peace and war, are lost. This suggests a mixed balance of priorities. If the reworked mythological stories are presented as models or alternatives to contemporary practices, they offer an alternative and conflicting hierarchy of social need. In this broader sense, the loss of a child for social progress or enhancement is privileged over the future of the family and its potential enrichment. As such the conflict here

she was about to be sacrificed. Erechtheus’ daughter may not have spoken and it is possible she might not have been on stage (Cropp, 1995b, p.150). However, it is also possible that, during the family scene when the daughters are told to love their mother “for there is no other such love that is more delightful to give” (*Erec.* 358) the daughters were on stage. Similarly, the *pathos* of the situation would be heightened if one or more daughters were on stage in the scene when, calling her “this girl” (*Erec.* 360. 38), Praxithea offers one of her daughters for sacrifice. This could also be the case when Praxithea is lamenting her daughter’s sacrifice and says the girl must be buried where she died (*Erec.* 370. 67-8).

⁶ The young adults in these plays are unmarried virgins of high rank chosen for sacrifice to save their city or family. They are assumed to be approximately thirteen to sixteen years old. Evidence from a “Pseudo-Aristotle” suggests Athenian heiresses married at thirteen (Garland, 2003, pp.159-60, 211).

between myth and society is portrayed with great dramatic force by an act not part of social convention but presented as part of a mythical divine morality.

The extant plays of Aeschylus and Euripides that include human sacrifice were performed between 458–406 BC during a period of social and religious change.⁷ These plays portray and accentuate the tensions involved in human choices and decisions made by the young adults. They present young adults as willing sacrificial offerings for the ‘greater good’: for the community in *Phoenician Women* and *Erechtheus*; for the community leaders in *Agamemnon* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*; and for both the Heracleidae and community in *The Children of Heracles* (in *Hecuba* there is no discernible benefit for the family or community). The victims do not choose to die but they can choose how they approach their deaths. They are shown as exemplars of courage and willingness to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Their voices demonstrate what it is to be selfless and their honourable actions demonstrate a striking maturity (in the sense of being ‘socialised’ into the dominant patriarchal values).

Greek tragedy is not a manifestation of the Athenian society in which it occurs — tragedy “offers no simple ‘reflection’ of the social processes”.⁸ Lack of such singular interpretation makes the inherent emotional conflicts, spawned by the sacrifice of children, the more difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, drama has a way of including them, “assimilating them into its own medium”⁹ — including them as an

⁷ The changes did not happen suddenly. For example, with the rise of the new democracy traditional functions of priesthood and magistrates, and the dominance in religious matters of the *gene*, were hard to alter (Parker, 1996, pp.124-9). Parker suggests, “the nerve centre of the city’s religion was now the democratic council” (Parker, 1996, p.124).

⁸ (Hall, 1997, p.94). Hesk suggests tragedies provoked reflection and questioning of social values more than receiving a “social message” (Hesk, 2007, p.84).

⁹ (Hall, 1997, p.94).

“undertext”.¹⁰ Indeed, the pivotal action of sacrifice is controlled by dramatic structure reinforcing the vulnerability of these young adults and accentuating its impact. A barrage of devices and subterfuges are employed: the spectacle of the scenery; the actors and their movements; the music; as well as the language presented to the audience all come together to make credible the incredible and knowable the unthinkable. The settings make use of well-known myths or are easily associated with contemporary situations. Speeches are regulated in both their formal aspects and in the modes of speaking — in their length and by who presents them. Messenger speeches, for example, give clear chronological accounts of the action offstage to the audience and actors onstage. The Messengers are responsible often for reporting the deaths of main characters giving the audience opportunities to experience different emotions and sympathies.¹¹ The detailed and often gruesome reports of death emphasise the associated honour and benefit to the country. Silences, passive or not, accentuate obedience and vulnerability of the victims as gestures and metaphors bring out the *pathos*. Known acts such as supplication and various literary forms together with signs again emphasise the vulnerability of the child victims and the need for, yet lack of, parental protection. Choral odes are employed to regulate the pace and bring out the full horror of the unfolding story (e.g. the choral odes in *Hecuba* (*Hec.* 444-83, 629-56, 905-51) give a background to the Trojan war after Polyxena is sacrificed). This together with the use of music and movement, links to the past and social present, create the Chorus as an emotional guide. All these

¹⁰ Vernant says that any attempt to see a political message in the texts, find contemporary parallels with the characters, or place the plays historically, does not fit with the idea that tragedy reflected a type of “reality”. For Vernant, tragedy had its own “mental world” in which religion, politics, social practices and the myths all play their part (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1981, p.7).

¹¹ (Wiles, 2000, p.16).

features connect the various aspects and nuances of the plot, and the resultant complex scenarios challenge the accepted fundamentals of the nature of family because of their extreme, yet convincing, abnormality. In this way tragedy incorporates into its form the “transformed” and “assimilated” aspects of the society of which it is part.¹²

2.2 The act of human sacrifice as a dramatic theme

The myths concerning the sacrifices of the young adults were adapted by the playwrights to create new interpretations of the violent nature of human sacrifice in the mythical past, its conflict with behavioural norms of civic fifth century BC society, and the shocking confrontation that this mixture brings about.¹³ This unavoidably presented novel and difficult challenges to contemporary audiences.¹⁴

¹² (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1981, p.8).

¹³ For example, in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, he innovatively omits the traditional mythical reason why Artemis was angry with Agamemnon (Agamemnon’s boast of being a better huntsman than the goddess) and includes both the offence of killing a pregnant hare and a fearful Iphigenia who is tied and gagged and has no chance of being saved by Artemis (*Ag.* 228-35). This version was also used by Sophocles in *Electra* (*S. El.* 564-77). It is probable, that Aeschylus wrote a play called *Iphigenia* based on the bringing of Iphigenia to Aulis by her mother for marriage to Achilles only to be sacrificed instead by her father, Agamemnon (Smyth, 1926, Fr. 46). Sophocles’ *Iphigenia* was probably also based on a similar plot to that of Aeschylus and Euripides’ plays (Lloyd-Jones, 2003, Fr. 305). Euripides also combined the Hesiodic account and the account found in the *Cypria* for his play, *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Here, Iphigenia is at the last minute replaced on the altar by a deer (*IA.* 1580-98). Euripides’ innovation was to introduce not only the arrival of the mother and daughter but also Agamemnon’s baby son, Orestes. This family scene portrays a mother concerned with the arrangements for her daughter’s wedding (*IA.* 607-30) and highlights the irony of the situation in which the main character Agamemnon (and presumably the audience) knows it is a subterfuge and that Iphigenia has not been brought to Aulis to marry Achilles.

¹⁴ (Foley, 1985, p.59). Garland suggests both Aeschylus and Euripides introduced explanatory factors (reasons contributing to things being as they are at the end of their plays to portray to the audience the importance of their mythical past to their own society). This linked the events on stage to the original rituals (Garland, 1992, p.156). However, Dunn suggests the plays take on the world of civic practice only to amend and modify it and disputes the Euripidean aetiology which seems to link the past events of myth and the real world of the Athenian audience (Dunn, 2000, p.27). Instead Dunn suggests an approach which considers aetiologies as creating a forced connection between the play and the receiving culture (Dunn, 2000, p.4). One example, he considers and disputes the truth of, is Athena’s

Whether intentionally or simply as a conflicting element of dramatic narrative divergent to known myth, the myths concerning the sacrifices of the young adults were innovatively reworked by each of the playwrights to create a new interpretation for the fifth century BC audience. For instance, alongside the suffering of the young adults about to be sacrificed, Euripides centres on the heroism of the mythical characters and examines such ideas as familial love and divine involvement in human lives. The concern Hecuba has for her daughter Polyxena (*Hec.* 385), Clytemnestra has for Iphigenia (*IA.* 1177-5), Creon for his son Menoeceus (*Phoen.* 970-6), Erechtheus for his daughter about loving her mother (*Erec.* 358), and Iolaus for Macaria (*Heracl.* 552-7) are all examples of familial concern for the more vulnerable members in their households.

Aeschylus deals with the capricious nature of the gods in their dealings with humans. The relationship of both Zeus and Artemis with Agamemnon at Aulis brings about change and inevitable suffering for Agamemnon's family. The expedition to Troy (*Ag.* 60-1), the omen (*Ag.* 111-20), Artemis' outrage at the innocent young of the hare being killed by the two eagles sent by Zeus (*Ag.* 135-7), and how justice was given by Zeus (*Ag.* 525-6), are examples of divine intervention that could more properly be called interference or manipulation. The nature of this interference, confronts Agamemnon with a seemingly impossible choice — allegiance to family, its sanctity and promise, or allegiance to his armies and the hope of victory at the expense of his child (*Ag.* 206-13). His choice to sacrifice his own daughter, Iphigenia raises issues which go against the emerging moral code of fifth century Athens which

words in the *Eumenides* when she makes a connection between the citizens judging Orestes and the establishment of the Aeropagus (a familiar institution to the Athenian audience) (*Eum.* 681-4) (Dunn, 2000, pp.5-7).

held strong views against human sacrifice, and upheld the importance of the family for the success and general cohesiveness of the society. The adaptations also emphasize the violent nature of human sacrifice and its results on the family while at the same time, because of the bravery and courage of the victims, portraying them as heroes or heroines.

Dramatic human sacrifice (*IA*. 1524) in the plays is made in response to the wrath of a god (*IA*. 90-1, *Phoen*. 936) or in answer to some supernatural demand (e.g. the appearance of the ghost of Achilles above his tomb (*Hec*. 37)). Although initially achieving the hoped for result it ends in destructive and long-term damage for the families (*Phoen*. 20) and the community (*Hec*. 160).¹⁵ Such repercussions seem inescapable but are not considered at the time when the pressing needs of the moment prevail. Iphigenia is sacrificed to Artemis so that the armies can sail to Troy, but the end result is the destruction of her family and the murder of her father.¹⁶ Polyxena is sacrificed to honour the dead Achilles (*Hec*. 309) before the Greeks can sail back home from Troy,¹⁷ but this death is one of the reasons Polyxena's mother, seeking revenge and punishment (*Hec*. 1024), commits the brutal murder of Polymestor's children. The sacrifice of Menoeceus is required to appease Ares and save the city, but his family is already destroyed, leaving his father to mourn his son, sister and nephews. Both Macaria and Erechtheus' daughter are sacrificed to save a

¹⁵ The 'dramatic' sacrifices have two roles — they achieve an end result but also "the demand for human sacrifice represents a continuation of the punishment — and hence the condition of abnormality" (Hughes, 1991, p.91). In this respect it is the family that is 'punished' because it loses its most potential and valuable members.

¹⁶ Girard suggests the "violence, spontaneous and senseless" is followed by "the sacrificial explanation" which hides the nature of the violent killing (Girard, 2005, p.132).

¹⁷ The sacrifice of Polyxena also appears in Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. Here Andromache tells her mother-in-law Hecuba, "Polyxena was murdered at Achilles' grave" as "a gift to him in death" (*Tro*. 622-3). Hecuba, in her grief, describes it as an "unholy sacrifice" (*Tro*. 628).

city — Macaria to the god Kore who demanded a maiden sacrifice and the daughter of Erechtheus in order to comply with the Delphic oracle.¹⁸ In some cases the sacrifice of these high-ranking young adults is only part of a much broader picture. Sometimes there is also the loss of a generation and the family line is broken (e.g. with the murder of Polymestor's children) and the loss of others caught up in the war that occurs after the sacrifice (e.g. soldiers killed in the war against Troy after Iphigenia is sacrificed).

The common themes in the plays such as sacrifice, family relationships, bravery and courage emphasise the placement of Greek consciousness at this time — tension between divine power and influence with the more human needs for the fabric of family, and the human sorrow that befalls if this fabric is undone. These commonalities highlight the dramatic characterisation of the victims themselves and the violent ritual way in which they were sacrificed: the primitive demands for virgins' blood, the violent cutting of their throats, the animal imagery, and the separation of the victims from the security and safety of the family prior to the sacrifices, combine in a way that cannot fail to shock. In this way the playwrights make the mythically based events “uneasy and problematic”¹⁹ to a society unfamiliar with human sacrifice.

There are similarities in the ritual practices involved in sacrifice in the plays and Athenian society, but the ‘dramatic’ sacrificial act itself is a perversion of accepted fifth century BC religious practices — young adults are violated and

¹⁸ Praxithea, in trying to save her city, sets aside her motherly allegiances. Later, when lamenting the death of both daughter and husband, she wonders whether the oracle misled her into sacrificing her daughter (*Erec.* 370 K 42-54).

¹⁹ (Cropp, 1995b, p.155).

sacrificed in ways that the Athenian society only condones for animals.²⁰ As such, the portrayal of human sacrifice in the plays both inverts and corrupts the central practice of animal sacrifice prevalent in Athenian and more broadly Greek society.²¹ There are some instances of child sacrifice in ancient literature. Herodotus recounts a story he heard from Egyptian priests about how, after the Trojan War when Menelaus found Helen in Egypt, in order to calm the winds so they could sail home, Menelaus sacrificed two Egyptian children. Herodotus calls this sacrifice a “foul act” which was unacceptable to the Egyptians (Hdt. II.119-20). Herodotus’ text is important for contemporary knowledge of Greek social attitudes, here demonstrating a high level of contempt for such killing and so provides some background for received social attitudes.

In the tragedies it is the nature of the sacrifice itself which is both part of a ritual process that the Athenians would recognise (e.g. the cutting of the victim’s throat) and also abhorrent because it involves young adults and not animals.²² In the plays only virgin blood is spilt and this is acquired by cutting the throats of the victim with a sword. In *Hecuba*, for example, Neoptolemus requires the virgin Polyxena’s “pure dark blood” (*Hec.* 537) as a “libation of appeasement” to his father,

²⁰ Athenians made animal sacrifices to their gods as part of a process of exchange where their gods, pleased with the offering and its value would be obliged to reciprocate with something of human benefit, protection or crop fertility. As there is very little evidence from Greek literature about which gods were propitiated the human side is highlighted making the sacrifice a reaffirmation of the “continuity of family or civic life” (Foley, 1985, p.34).

²¹ (Hughes, 1991, pp.190-3).

²² Depiction of virgin sacrifice is found in the act of marriage; the pseudo-aggression of “hurling flowers and smashing pots” and the bride’s ultimate defloration and shedding of blood have strong sacrificial connotations (Burkert, 1983, p.62). In a hunting society, in order for a man to kill he must sacrifice his desire for courtship, marriage and the erotic. Virgin sacrifice represents this denial in favour of the hunt. In this way maiden sacrifice is different from the “giving in order to get” basis of the conventional animal sacrifice (Burkert, 1983, p.64).

the dead hero Achilles (*Hec.* 534). This requirement is specific — it is only a virgin's blood that is suitable. When Hecuba previously offered her own life to save her daughter's she was rejected because Achilles' ghost demanded the sacrifice of her virgin daughter (*Hec.* 390). Hecuba, refusing to let go of her child, offers to die with her daughter so "there will be twice the draught of blood" (*Hec.* 391-3). Odysseus tells Hecuba that her death is not wanted — one death is enough and that is too much (*Hec.* 394-5). In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Iphigenia submits her "neck to the knife (*IA.* 1560), and her virginal "pure blood" (*IA.* 1574) is thus spilled. In *Phoenician Women*, the unmarried Menoeceus' blood also is the "libation blood of slaughter" (*Phoen.* 933) given to save his native land. In *Ion*, Kreousa says her sisters, the daughters of Erechtheus, were sacrificed for the land of Athens (*Ion.* 278). In *The Children of Heracles* the noble blood of the virgin Macaria is required to save a city; her throat will be cut like the others as she courageously offers herself for sacrifice (*Heracl.* 490). Virgin blood is a recurring theme in human sacrifice and the idea that it has a strong primitive foundation in the Athenian consciousness is not unreasonable.²³

To heighten the tragedy of the young adults' situation even further, the dramatic victims are killed in the same way animals are ritually killed as offerings for sacrifice. This brings the unfamiliar element of brutal and savage human sacrifice and combines it with well-known and easily recognised practices. The playwrights' metaphorical use of a wild mountain heifer — one to be hunted — to describe the young adult makes the dramatic human sacrifice more poignant because it

²³ Loraux defines the Greek word *sphagē* (and its derivatives) for throat cutting by the sword and the resulting flow of blood (Loraux, 1987, pp.13-14). Ajax describes the sword he will use on himself — "the killer" — in the same way (*Aj.* 815). In contrast, death by hanging, as in the case for Antigone (*Ant.* 1291), is more usually the way for grieving wives.

transgresses the rules and expectations of a society in which mainly ‘domesticated’ animals are used for ritual killing.²⁴ The use of the hunted wild animal for sacrifice was uncommon — generally the sacrificial animal had to be alive and seem ‘willing’ to be sacrificed.²⁵ The parallel to the wild animal in the plays has the effect of portraying the victim as part civilized and part savage — both human, and animal. In this sense because the victims are likened to savage animals there is some amelioration of the savage act of the sacrifice.²⁶ But the savagery still remains. There is no escaping that these victims are defenceless young adults — conventionally still needing protection from their parents and all the more exposed because of the lack of it. The sadness of their situation is accentuated by their own self-awareness. In her desperation not to lose her mother, Polyxena describes herself as a “miserable whelp, like a mountain-bred heifer” (*Hec.* 206),²⁷ who is about to be torn from her mother’s arms and taken away for sacrifice to become the bride of Hades (*Hec.* 206-9, 367). The *pathos* of this appeal is enhanced by it being made by a young girl — a highly emotive expression of mental anguish from the most vulnerable who will now not live to marry and have children. Euripides’ description of Iphigenia as a wild mountain heifer “coming down from the rocky caves” (*IA.* 1083) does not sit easily

²⁴ Athenian sacrificial animals were normally led alive to the altar and were domesticated (e.g. pigs, cattle, goats), not hunted animals such as lions or deer. In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, Pentheus is described as a lion (*Bacch.* 1142). He is young (*Bacch.* 1174) and has a mother who loves her son, grieving uncontrollably once she realises that she has killed him (*Bacch.* 1282). Unlike Agamemnon, Agaue has no knowledge of the act she has committed.

²⁵ The victim is “sprinkled with water” which causes the victim to show its “consent by bowing its head” (Burkert, 1966, p.107).

²⁶ (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1981, p.153).

²⁷ Mossman believes these metaphors significantly contrast with the brutal animal imagery at the end of *Hecuba* when Hecuba and her maids are described as “murderous bitches” (*Hec.* 1172), and when Polymestor prophesies that Hecuba will be changed into a “bitch with glaring blood-shot eyes” (*Hec.* 1265) (Mossman, 1995, p.151).

with the unavoidable and obvious fact that Iphigenia is a young girl who should still be looked after in her father's *oikos*. The metaphor contrasts the freedom and untamed nature of the animal in the wild to the plight of the 'captured' Iphigenia, reared by her mother to become a bride (*IA*. 454-68), but destined by her father to become the "bride[s] for Hades".²⁸ The reality is one of tragic death wrought on the weakest and most vulnerable by the very person charged with her care. The *pathos* of her situation is highlighted when a wreath, placed on her head by Calchas, replaces her expected marriage garland as she is led to the altar to have her throat cut (*IA*. 1565-77). The rituals for a wedding and a sacrifice are similar, "both bride and victim are adorned and led in procession"²⁹ and these pitiful human victims, garlanded and brought in procession to their deaths are, indeed, like brides. The attention on them, however, is not a focus for joy and optimism for the future but for horror and a foreboding of what such a terrible act might bring about.

The act of sacrifice itself conveys powerful images. Aeschylus' Iphigenia is laid on the altar like a one-year old sacrificial goat (*Ag*. 232), an act that reminds the audience of the young age of Iphigenia who is a virgin (*Ag*. 229).³⁰ Unlike Euripides' Iphigenia, Artemis does not replace this Iphigenia with a deer, and the audience are confronted by the full and undistorted brutality of the situation.³¹ Here, the Chorus recounts how Iphigenia, before being hoisted into the air by Agamemnon's men and

²⁸ (Loraux, 1987, p.37).

²⁹ (Seaford, 1987, p.109).

³⁰ Menoeceus is called a "colt" (*Phoen*. 947) to signify his youth and virgin status. He is "unyoked" (untamed, wild) and, as such, joins the female victims metaphorically as 'animal like' offerings to be slaughtered in the hope of something in return.

³¹ Euripides' Iphigenia is saved and to some extent social and ritual order has been reinstated. It appears an animal, not a young girl, has been sacrificed to propitiate a god. A sacrificial animal has symbolically been substituted for a human.

placed on the altar to be sacrificed, is tied and gagged so she cannot cry out or curse the war on Troy (*Ag.* 232-7). This ‘silencing’ further reduces the worth of the individual — one who should attract the highest level of protection. Agamemnon cannot, or will not, save Iphigenia and, for Agamemnon’s men, who were ‘hungry for war’ (*Ag.* 230), Iphigenia’s life was worthless (*Ag.* 229-30). The horror of the situation is consolidated by the exposure as Iphigenia is taken against her will and sacrificed in front of an unruly mob.

Young unmarried girls were usually kept out of the public gaze until their marriage and this public display of a virgin in front of the Greek armies highlights further Iphigenia’s vulnerability and the lack of conventional and expected protection from her family.³² Euripides portrays Iphigenia in a similar way although Euripides’ Iphigenia is not forced against her will like Aeschylus’ Iphigenia. Euripides’ Iphigenia is complicit in that she consents to her sacrifice. However, it is reported that she is also surrounded by the Greek armies who demand her death (*IA.* 1260-6). This exposure has an erotic connotation.³³ It can be clearly determined along with the incontrovertibly violent nature of the death of the young victims involved, and their lack of any true choice in the manner and circumstances of their deaths.³⁴

In *Hecuba* when Polyxena tears the top half of her dress to reveal her breasts and upper half of her body which look, “lovely as a statue’s” (*Hec.* 558-61)³⁵ the image is

³² (Scodel, 1996, p.112).

³³ In Cacoyannis’ film *Iphigenia* this is represented like a mass rape by the army as they crowd around the young girl (Cacoyannis, 1977).

³⁴ Rabinowitz suggests Iphigenia is a willing victim who desires to be seen and wants to be adulated by all Greece as their saviour (Rabinowitz, 1993, pp.47-8).

³⁵ Hall suggests Polyxena’s disrobing is a “graphic example” of the “difficult borderline between arousing desire and arousing a more contemplative reaction” (Hall, 2007, p.19).

reported on stage by a male character, Talthybius, to Polyxena's mother Hecuba in front of a mainly male audience.³⁶ In this way the audience has two perspectives of the sacrifice — one from the messenger who has seen the sacrifice and the other from a grieving mother. The audience and Hecuba only hear what has happened — they do not see Polyxena removing her dress on stage. Instead, because the act is hidden from sight the erotic implication is realised. Although Polyxena's intention was not to arouse desire, the imagined image of a semi-naked young girl has high erotic potential especially to the male spectators who must create their own mental 'picture' of what remains of the unseen. Continuing the suggestion of this visual portrayal of the erotic, Talthybius relates how the semi-naked Polyxena kneels in front of Neoptolemus and asks him to strike either "in the throat, like a sacrificial victim, or in the breast, like a warrior".³⁷ With her throat cut, her final gesture before she dies is to fall to the ground modestly trying to cover her body, trying to hide "what should be hidden from male eyes" (*Hec.* 569). This powerful image invokes an even higher level of erotic visualisation, the receiver in this case, whether it is Talthybius, the Greek armies, or the audience, imagining the unseen and normally prohibited — the possibility of being able to see a young girl's sexual parts. Arguably, in doing this, the erotic anticipation could be curtailed — breeched by the brutal and shocking reality of Polyxena's death.

The dread of exposure cannot be underrated as an important part of the victims' frame of mind, even beyond the point of death. Macaria expresses her fear of dying in front of a crowd when she says she goes to the "terror of sacrifice"

³⁶ (Segal, 1990, pp.111-12).

³⁷ (Loraux, 1987, p.60). Like Polyxena, Euripides' Iphigenia also bravely presents her neck to her captors, astounding those around by her strength of mind and fearless nature (*IA.* 1559-61).

(*Heracl.* 562). Macaria is afraid her dead body will be exposed and hopes she will die in the presence of women so her body is not violated (*Heracl.* 565-6). Others too are aware of the associated horror. For example, Polyxena is placed in an exposed position closely surrounded by chosen Achaeans (and before the whole of the Achaean army). Even though she falls “modestly” (*Hec.* 569), she is deprived of her dignity. She is a victim to the mob, her own defilement and ultimate death.

Menoceus who stands alone at the top of a tower when he cuts his own throat with a “black-bound sword” (*Phoen.* 1091-2) has a more private death but still the exposure after death is realised. His body is found at the bottom of the cliffs by his grieving father, Creon who carries it to Jocasta to be washed in preparation for burial (*Phoen.* 1315-19).

The act of human sacrifice has many connotations that are in conflict with social conventions and psychological expectations of the fifth century Athenian citizen. Its depiction in tragic drama provides strong evidence of dramatic shock that runs deeply against the prevalent Athenian consciousness and so provides depictions strongly at odds with cultural tradition and expectations.

2.3 Effect of sacrifice on family relationships

Each character, sacrificed for something deemed more worthy, is of great emotional cost to their family and this cost affects the victims’ parents in ways that emphasize a parent’s love — a value firmly embedded in Greek society of this time.³⁸ Creon, in *Phoenician Women* says, “for to all mankind to love their children is a way of life”

³⁸ Lycurgus says, “all women are by nature fond of children” (*Lycurg.* 1.101). Aristotle says a parent’s love towards their child is defined by wanting the child to “exist and live ... which mothers do to their children” (*Eth. Nic.* 1166a.4-6). The ‘dramatic’ parents exhibit this emotional feeling; they “love their children as being a part of themselves” (*Eth. Nic.* 1161b.18).

(*Phoen.* 965-6). His child is dearer to him than his land so he gives Menoeceus an opportunity to escape prior to him taking his own life (*Phoen.* 970-6). Hecuba in *Hecuba*, unwilling to lose the daughter who means so much to her, expresses her anguish saying “do not leave me childless” (*Hec.* 439). In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra’s dismay at the loss of her daughter will eventually lead to her taking revenge.³⁹ In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the Chorus, speaking of Clytemnestra’s motherhood, reminds the audience “being a mother is strangely powerful, and it exercises a great charm on the heart” (*IA.* 917). The anguish of loss can be felt by both parents, and indeed can include those responsible for ordering the sacrifice. Euripides’ *Agamemnon* is distraught, himself in a vulnerable and unavoidable position trying to appease his armies but knowing he is sending his daughter to her death. He begs forgiveness as “the tears come quickly to my [his] eyes” (*IA.* 683-5) and he “wept” and “groaned,” hiding his eyes, when Iphigenia walks into the grove to be sacrificed (*IA.* 1549-50). Another father, Creon in *Phoenician Women*, grieves for his son, Menoeceus, as he carries his body from the cliff back to the house (*Phoen.* 1316-17). Like Hecuba (*Hec.* 386-7), Creon would willingly die in place of his child (*Phoen.* 969) saying he could never give his child for sacrifice (*Phoen.* 966), a sentiment reiterated by Demophon in *The Children of Heracles* who says, “is there a man so base that he would hand over his beloved children?” (*Heracl.* 413).⁴⁰

In the tragedies, at times of war, royal families suffer from the loss of the sacrificed young adults, but citizens and their families also suffer losses and make

³⁹ Zeitlin ironically takes up the animal imagery of the pregnant hare and the eagles (*Ag.* 49-59) when she refers to Iphigenia as a daughter of a mother, “robbed of her young” (Zeitlin, 1965, p.482).

⁴⁰ A marble gravestone (c. 420 BC) portrays the intimacy between father and his children. Xanthippos, a shoe maker, has his one hand on his daughter’s shoulder, while his other daughter looks up to her father’s face (from the Townley Collection at the British Museum, GR 1805.7-3.183 (Sculpture 628)).

sacrifices. In *Agamemnon*, the Chorus speak of the “sorrows” (*Ag.* 427-30) of the people left at home in Greece⁴¹ and the sacrifices of the men who go to war. The soldiers in *Agamemnon* have little space in their “wretched quarters” and suffer every day from the weather, the continual destruction of their clothes, and head lice (*Ag.* 556-65). Many come back “in urns and ashes, not living men” (*Ag.* 436) leaving their children without fathers. This bleak metaphor Aeschylus uses to describe the deaths of Agamemnon’s soldiers shows the needless loss of life and the truth in the soldiers’ voices — reported by the Herald — when, despite their skill in battle and their bravery, the deaths of their ‘dramatic’ companions were “*for another’s wife*” (*Ag.* 446-8). The dramatic representations of parents such as Agamemnon who orders his daughter to be sacrificed and takes soldiers to war for reasons not necessarily beneficial to their city reveal an act inconsistent with fatherly love and a disregard for family and societal implications. It would be an act at odds with Athenian citizens in the audience who upheld family values in the same way they would uphold the values of the state.⁴² Because of this the impact in the plays of already shocking human sacrifice is redoubled and with this the dramatic force is further amplified.

⁴¹ Similar emotional feelings are described in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*. The women tell of what it is like without their husbands — how they are never at home (*Lys.* 99-106), how they give their husbands sons and then their sons are sent to fight (*Lys.* 590), and how they grow old and grey while their husbands are away (*Lys.* 596).

⁴² In fifth century BC Athenian society family and community are interrelated and interdependent — the family is part of the community and the community depends on the involvement and welfare of the family. The reputation of an Athenian father, head of his *oikos* and active in the community, was dependent on his ability to be a good parent and a good citizen. Aeschines’ explanation in *Speeches against Ctesiphon* that “the man who hates his child and is a bad father could never become a safe guide to the people” (*In Ctes.* 3.78) portrays this sentiment.

2.4 Willingness and courage of the victims

Apart from Aeschylus' Iphigenia, all the dramatic victims are portrayed as dying for their country — they dutifully meet danger 'face to face' courageously and honourably in a way that matches the Periclean standard that praises the importance of the Athenian city state and the brave men who are "worthy of their city" (Thuc. 2.43). Euripides' treatment of Polyxena creates a brave heroine who courageously accepts her death and follows the same innovative characterisation style of Macaria, Menoeceus, Erechtheus' daughter and Iphigenia. The adaptations made by Euripides have the propensity to focus more sharply on the *pathos* of the young adults who are sacrificed and their relationships with their parents and families. These characters act as exemplars of loyalty both towards their family and their country, and recognition of their situation makes their courageous and patriotic responses richer. All the sacrificial victims die young, yet instead of being understandably frightened, apart from Aeschylus' Iphigenia, who could only look pitiful and terrified (*Ag.* 240), the young adults, when faced with their own death, were willing to die, a willingness born of reason. This willingness, to some extent, makes the perpetrators, or the gods who are demanding the sacrifices, less responsible than, on the face of it, the murderous act implies.

Polyxena prefers to die as a royal princess than live and be a slave to a Greek master, or share a slave's bed (*Hec.* 350-66). Like Polyxena, Macaria 'prefers' death to life as a slave in a city captured by her enemy (*Heracl.* 510-14). The last words of Euripides' Iphigenia are to her father, telling him she goes willingly to the altar and hopes her sacrifice will give him good fortune in war and that he will return home (*IA.* 1552-62). She has already told her mother she was born for Greece and if Greek

soldiers attack their enemy and die, so can she (*IA*. 1379-93).⁴³ Macaria selflessly decides to give her life to save her brothers who have sought sanctuary at the temple in the city (*Heracl.* 490). The city has protected her family and, in a reciprocal act, Macaria is now willing to give her life on its behalf, even though Iolaus offered Macaria a chance of reprieve by drawing lots with her sisters to decide who should be sacrificed (*Heracl.* 543-6). Macaria refuses and offers herself “willingly for these boys” (*Heracl.* 550), and for the greater good of the city that has offered its protection to her brothers.⁴⁴ This altruistic theme extends to the loyal Menoeceus who also has no thought for himself when he goes against his father’s wishes. He says he will not be a “traitor to the country which gave me birth” (*Phoen.* 996), believing the safety of the city to be worth more than his place in the family. For Polyxena, Euripides’ Iphigenia, Menoeceus and Macaria, their destiny is compromised — they will die. They cannot affect this outcome but they can affect the process that leads up to it, and they can affect the qualities of being sacrificed by bringing to bear strength of character, pronounced commitment to the society and its aims, bravery and duty to family. In other words they exhibit all of the higher moral qualities: virtue; duty; and concern for a greater good. These human qualities occur in the face of the superior divine cause. These human qualities are not frailties in the face of divine power but expressions of the strength that humans have within themselves and their ability to enhance the quality of human life no matter what the gods prescribe. These young adults, when faced with a terrible death, find their own voice and the courage to speak.

⁴³ A heroic Iphigenia, the first casualty of the Trojan war, is its “prime mover” stealing glory that cannot be surpassed by any warrior (Luschnig, 1988, Epilogue).

⁴⁴ A reciprocal exchange also occurs in *Hecuba* when Hecuba asks Odysseus to spare her daughter’s life in return for when she saved his life (*Hec.* 251-95).

The ‘voice’ of the victims reveals the importance of their place within the family and the precarious balance in which competing factors can sometimes be held. A child’s sensitivity reveals startling human traits and qualities that in adulthood can become masked by political, social and economic gains all subject to the manifest power and control of the gods.

‘Voice’ can on the one hand be simply the presence of a character in the narrative; on the other the character’s own spoken words — in other words it can relate to both the characterised subject (as actually present) or the utterance itself. The dramatic function of ‘voice’ plays an important part in exposing the conflict of cultural tradition and expectations generated by the tragedies. For example, both Aeschylus’ Iphigenia’s ‘absent’ ‘voice’ after she is gagged (*Ag.* 236) and Euripides’ Iphigenia’s words on stage (*IA.* 1416-20) are central to the conflict portrayed. Macaria’s ‘voice’ exposes the place of young girls in the family when, offering herself for sacrifice, she says that without her brothers she has no family, and without a family she is worthless. This leads her to condemn herself. She asks, “who will want to have a girl without family as his wife or to beget children by me?” (*Herac.* 524). The young adults’ ‘voice’ may also deal with simple social conventions. Euripides’ Agamemnon tells Iphigenia to “go into the tent — maidens don’t enjoy being looked at” (*IA.* 678-9). From the moment Macaria enters on stage she also reminds the audience of the private world of the *oikos*, that young girls should be quiet and modest “staying quietly in the house” (*Herac.* 475). She has only been brought outside because she heard Iolaus lamenting. An added shocking twist here is that Macaria’s contravention of this simple expectation leads to her discovering that she will be sacrificed. A fate born of similar simple beginnings is shared by Polyxena

who, breaking the same rule when she comes out of her house, alarmed by her mother's cries (*Hec.* 177-9), finds out she will be sacrificed.

The spoken words of Euripides' Iphigenia, Polyxena, Menoeceus and Macaria give a 'voice' that reveals a dramatically 'convincing' young adult — credible to the audience because they tap into commonly held beliefs and views: devotion to mothers; a patriotic desire to help their country; the conquering of fear in the face of death; fidelity to family.

Polyxena's mature words to her mother telling her not to stand in her way as she is led to her sacrifice (*Hec.* 371-1) reveal not only her love and concern for her mother but also her courage and bravery before being sacrificed. Polyxena does not want to dishonour herself, for her "life without honour is great suffering" (*Hec.* 377). She readily breaks the rule of manners and acts less passively before her sacrifice to her male captors saying "let me go freely" (*Hec.* 549). Her bravery epitomises the finest qualities of courage when in her "bravest, saddest words of all" (*Hec.* 561) she tells Neoptolemus he has the choice to kill her by striking her breast or her neck, and that she is ready to die (*Hec.* 563-4). Macaria, like Polyxena, does not want to live and so be taken by the enemy, or to run away and become "a wanderer" (*Heracl.* 514) — a situation too shameful for a young girl, especially if she has no one in her family to look after her. She makes "the finest discovery, how to die gloriously" (*Heracl.* 532) as she tells the men to lead her to her sacrifice. Euripides' Iphigenia forbids her mother to weep before telling the Chorus she was raised "as a light of salvation to Greece" (*IA.* 1502) — she too will die a honourable death. Like Macaria and Polyxena she contravenes convention and is proactive in controlling those around her, demanding that no Greek should hold her while she submits herself bravely to the sword (*IA.* 1560).

This sentiment is echoed by Menoeceus. In short half lines he speaks to his father, first agreeing to escape then, after persuading Creon to leave, telling the Chorus he is not a coward or a traitor and he will sacrifice his life to save his city (*Phoen.* 991-1017). Here, Menoeceus' 'voice' is one of courageousness and selflessness. His only course of action is to kill himself and "to give gift of death not dishonourable for the city" (*Phoen.* 1013). His last altruistic words proclaiming how he will save his city drives home the idea that if everyone felt the same about their city there would be "fewer ills", and the city would have "good fortune" (*Phoen.* 1017) in the future. These are, like Polyxena's, very mature words for a young adult (particularly as he knows he must kill himself). For an audience, especially those spectators with children of a similar age, the words of these young adults may not have seemed plausible — young adults would not have spoken to their parents in this way, and would not have been in a position to offer their lives to save their country. However, the sentiment of loyalty to one's city would have been easily identified with. The young adult's 'voice' here is particularly striking — the greatest human sacrifice, the finest words and the strongest urging of allegiance to the state all proclaimed on the grandest political stage by those considered possessions of the tightest family environment.

2.5 Dramatic structure

Sacrifices of young adults are pivotal to the dramatic action — itself controlled by a dramatic structure which includes not only presence and voice but also various mechanisms and 'undertext'.⁴⁵ This includes the length and positioning of the

⁴⁵ Dramatic structure of Greek tragedy includes numerous devices that Vernant calls the "undertext" (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1981, p.7).

messenger speeches, the prolonged silences of the young adults while on stage, gestures made towards and from the young adults, the vocabulary used (as opposed to grammar and construction) and choral odes. Both Aeschylus and Euripides combine these dramatic devices to portray the physical and psychological effects of human sacrifice on their plot and vulnerability of their characters. In addition, external forces such as cultural convention, religious practices, social or economic pressures or pressures of conflict provide influential contexts for reception. The climax might vary according to context. For example, a war climax, as in Aeschylus' *The Persians*, at a time of war may need to have particularly realistic appeal; or a political innovation, such as the ending of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* at a time of political change may need to incorporate some contemporary parallel. Dramatic structure is therefore a complex mixture of internal and external factors.

Violent events and deaths were rarely acted out on stage.⁴⁶ Instead the playwrights used the messenger speech — a narrative speech — as a device to explain how the young adults were sacrificed. It may be that in light of the oral tradition of the time this is a “deliberate choice”⁴⁷ on the part of the playwrights. The

⁴⁶ Exceptions are: Ajax commits suicide on stage (*Aj.* 865); Hippolytus is brought home to die at his father's house (*Hipp.* 1457-8); and Alcestis dies with her children and husband present (*Alc.* 390). There is also “the mysterious suicidal leap of Evadne in *Suppliant Women*” (Easterling, 1997a, p.154). Violent deaths are sometimes heard off stage such as the cries of Medea's children (*Med.* 1279) or the cry of Agamemnon (*Ag.* 1343, 1345).

⁴⁷ (Macintosh, 1994, p.127). Macintosh concentrates on the lack of death scenes on stage and the fact that messenger speeches rarely describe the actual “point of death”. She suggests this stems from the point of death in ancient Greece having less importance than the process of dying and this supports the idea that the reports of death in Greek drama concentrate more on the person responsible for the deaths than the victims (Macintosh, 1994, p.127). Macintosh also considers the aesthetic (put forward by Steiner) on how the spectators' emotional response is affected if they are required to use their imagination when listening to a messenger speech. Easterling suggests the playwrights were restrained by attitudes of decorum and religious restrictions (Easterling, 1997a, p.154). Easterling also believes the messenger speech has the ability to narrate an event more vividly and intensely (Easterling, 1997a, p.154) than it being performed on stage to an audience more familiar, for instance, with the rhapsodic style of narrated stories from Homer.

audience, in this case, is “forced by words alone to imagine the unimaginable”.⁴⁸ For instance, the report of Menoeceus’ fall from a high tower (*Phoen.* 1091), or a deer struggling for breath and left on an altar as the replacement for a disappearing Iphigenia (*IA.* 1583-89) sounds more dramatic in words than if seen (even if it were possible for the action to take place on stage). Equally the image reported by Talthybius of Polyxena tearing the top half of her dress to reveal her breasts (*Hec.* 557-9) is shocking and “profoundly un-Greek”.⁴⁹ Aeschylus’ Iphigenia who “shed to earth her saffron robe” (*Ag.* 239) — a possible metaphor for the pouring of her blood as her throat is cut⁵⁰ — conjures up in the minds of the listener a similar evocative image of a young semi-naked girl.⁵¹

But neither a view that the audience was used to listening to stories nor that the audience held certain attitudes towards the moment of death, explains why some Messenger speeches were short and non-descriptive (despite possible lacunae) and others much longer and highly emotive. It may be that the form of these speeches was devised as a mechanism to guide the audience’s positive emotional response towards the victim and in others towards the safety of the community. For instance,

⁴⁸ (Wiles, 2000, p.16).

⁴⁹ The full quote is, “it would have been, I suspect, profoundly un-Greek to have naked bodies or naked maskless faces revealed in the course of a tragedy”. Quote taken from a paper delivered by Oliver Taplin at a conference on *Tantalus* hosted by the Centre for Hellenic Studies in May 2001. <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/people/imagesdocs/ottantalus.htm#top>, accessed 31.03.10. Taplin also says that although naked bodies would not have been shown on stage, naked figures, for example, those of Orestes and Pylades, were portrayed on vases (Taplin, 1997, p.77).

⁵⁰ (Lloyd-Jones, 1952, pp.134-5).

⁵¹ Other modern interpretations of this scene suggest Iphigenia’s complete nakedness; her robe trailing on the ground from her hoisted body; Iphigenia holding onto Agamemnon’s robes (Lebeck, 1964, p.35) and a bridal veil (Seaford, 1987, p.108). The exposure of Iphigenia’s ‘nakedness’ in the face of so many men standing around her, whether she is robed or not is similar to Polyxena’s situation. To the Greek army, Iphigenia looks, “like a figure in a painting” (*Ag.* 241). To the Achaeans, Polyxena is like a statue (*Hec.* 559). Both are somehow transformed — their humanity is momentarily set aside.

some reports such as the two describing Macaria and Menoeceus' deaths are short with very little amount of detail, if any, of the actual sacrifice. The emphasis is more on the security of the community — “relieving the city from capture” (E. *El.* 1024) — that requires brief acknowledgment of a noble sacrifice. In other reports, such as the sacrifice of Polyxena, the events surrounding her sacrifice is slowly built up to a climax after which the action of the main character Hecuba falls to a catastrophic end.

In *The Children of Heracles*, Macaria exits at line 601 (just over halfway through the play) to be sacrificed. There is no messenger to report her death or how she died. This is the first play of Euripides in which a young adult is sacrificed.⁵² Possibly there is a lacuna after her exit in which her sacrifice is reported and where she is justly commended for her bravery.⁵³ Whether or not this is the case the action continues smoothly from Macaria's exit, with Iolaus sitting down while the Chorus consoles him (the second stasimon), telling him not to grieve, before a servant enters to report the arrival of Heracles' son. The Chorus' short song is the only acknowledgement after Macaria's exit of her “glorious” death, “on behalf of her brothers and this land” (*Heracl.* 622). The reference specifically to her death is brief

⁵² The dates of most of Euripides' plays are estimated either by matching them to historical events or by analysing the texts themselves for literary qualities. Euripides' *The Children of Heracles* was, according to historical events, performed 430-428 BC close to the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Allan bases the dates of Euripides' plays on an increasing tendency to a “higher proportion of resolutions to trimeters” in his iambs (Allan, 2001b, p.54). Allan points out an alternative view by Goossens and Delebecque that says *The Children of Heracles* was written as a response to the political situation and a ‘patriotic’ Euripides was motivated to write this play at the start of the Peloponnesian War (Allan, 2001b, pp.43-4). Allan suggests the children who are “innocent victims of Argive aggression” is significant to the play and that any reference to Athenian history is not the central issue (Allan, 2001b, p.44). See Csapo and Slater for further information on the dating of plays performed in Athens (Csapo & Slater, 1995, from written and oral sources pp.5-14 and competition records pp.226-9).

⁵³ (Allan, 2001b, pp.35-6). Macaria's sacrifice may have been reported in an original copy of the play between lines 604-30 (Lesky, 1977, pp.234-5).

— only eight lines — and although it does justice to her courage and bravery it is more a comment on excellence gained through effort (*Heracl.* 624). The report of how Menoeceus cuts his throat and falls from the top of a tower (*Phoen.* 1090-2) is also short.

The death of Menoeceus is reported almost as an incidental occurrence to Jocasta. It occurs just over half way through the play and is only three lines long. Menoeceus' father gives a few more details about where he found his son and how sad he was as he carried his son's body away from the dragon cliffs back to his house (*Phoen.* 1313-17). The Chorus only mentions Menoeceus' sacrifice briefly but the impact and importance of Menoeceus' death is incorporated into the dramatic structure in such a way that it carries a different importance from that of Iphigenia or Polyxena's sacrifice. Menoeceus' fame as the saviour of his city is momentary; he is not even named and although the Chorus say the sacrifice may have saved the city,⁵⁴ they still believe there is only one person who will grieve — his father (*Phoen.* 1055-60). Here there is some similarity to Pericles' Funeral Oration, as reported by Thucydides, where Pericles says if a child dies then those "who are still an age to have children must be stout-hearted in the hope of having other sons" (Thuc. 2.44). Even though the comparison is not exact (many died in the first year of the Peloponnesian war) nevertheless the sentiment is the same — the grief of a father, such as Creon's, can be overcome for the sake of the community. The Chorus is pleased that only one young person will die to save the many — "we are happy, happy that one goes to his death" (*Phoen.* 1055-6). Similarly, in *The Children of*

⁵⁴ Menoeceus' decision to disobey his father and sacrifice himself brings the action back to the myth (Foley, 1985, p.112). If Menoeceus had followed his father's wishes and run away the prophecy would not have been fulfilled.

Heracles Iolaus' grief is overcome by knowing that one death has also saved many (*Heracl.* 620-7).

Praxithea, in *Erechtheus*, echoes this sentiment when she says it is not right to destroy the many inhabitants when she "can give one girl to die for all" (*Erec.* 360.18). In *Erechtheus*, there is a lost Messenger's speech that may have reported the sacrifice of Erechtheus' daughters.⁵⁵ Before the Messenger's arrival (*Erec.* 370.12-22) Praxithea was adamant about the need to sacrifice her daughter to save her city. After the Messenger's arrival she knows the city has been saved, but her husband is dead and her three daughters have been sacrificed. The missing Messenger's speech may have described her daughters' sacrifice as the mention of their "bruised limbs" (*Erec.* 370.37) causes Praxithea to remark that anyone who does not appreciate her sorrow is cruel. As a wife and a mother, she laments the death of her husband and she cannot defend the "unholy, unhallowed" (*Erec.* 370.41) sacrifice of her daughters.

These sacrifices, not witnessed by a crowd of people (as in *Agamemnon*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* or *Hecuba*), are made so that the community can be saved. The need for a detailed and lengthy report of Menoeceus and Macaria's deaths is not necessary, their importance in the dramatic structure is to portray how the community is saved by their action.

The brevity of these reports raises questions of how different types of sacrifice are placed in the context of the dramatic structure. The report of the sacrifice of Euripides' Iphigenia is placed at the end of the play and afforded two separate reports; first by the Chorus and then by the second messenger leading to

⁵⁵ (Cropp, 1995b, p.186).

what might be considered a happy ending — Iphigenia has “flown away up to heaven” (*IA*.1608) and Agamemnon is praised by the Chorus leader for defeating Troy (*IA*. 1627-9). As such, the report of Iphigenia’s death has a different role in the dramatic structure. At lines 1510-31, after Iphigenia has described why she should be sacrificed, the Chorus sing about her beauty and the ritual she will undergo, so that her father can sail to Troy. It is possible that the first performance of the play ended at this point⁵⁶ so throwing the emphasis of the Chorus’ report clearly on Iphigenia’s brave decision to be sacrificed to “give the Greeks salvation and victory” (*IA*. 1473). If the play did end at this point then a further ninety-eight lines were added later allowing a second messenger to give an eyewitness account to Clytemnestra of the sacrifice of Iphigenia.⁵⁷ In this report Agamemnon is exonerated from his daughter’s murder by an explanation that Iphigenia is with the gods (*IA*. 1609-12). The second messenger is a Greek and his report is poignant as he describes fully from beginning to end how Iphigenia was sacrificed and replaced by a deer. He details the sadness Agamemnon felt, when Iphigenia bravely entered the grove (*IA*. 1550), the sorrow he felt when Calchas examined Iphigenia’s neck (*IA*. 1579) and the joy (*IA*. 1588) Calchas and the whole army felt when they saw Iphigenia had disappeared. The emphasis of this lengthy report is on the emotional effect the sacrifice of a young girl had on the people around her, including her father, and the relief experienced when they saw a deer on the altar gasping and bloody instead of Iphigenia (*IA*. 1584-9). The dramatic structure is affected by the delayed tension leading to the conclusion.

⁵⁶ (Kovacs, 2002, pp.157-63).

⁵⁷ This ‘addition’ was possibly added by Euripides’ son posthumously for a later performance or, because it has “neither classical vowel lengths nor the rules of tragic meter”, from a much later writer (Kovacs, 2002, pp.161, 333, 337).

Such feelings are not reported in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Instead the Chorus, during the early stages of the play, emphasize the brutality of Iphigenia's sacrifice and how her father cruelly made his decision to kill her. They describe how the armies wanted the sacrifice (*Ag.* 230) but the Chorus was not present (the sacrifice took place ten years earlier (*Ag.* 40) and so cannot and do not relate what happened to Iphigenia after the sword cut her throat (*Ag.* 248). In this short report (at the end of a long choral ode lasting 218 lines) the stress is more on the gruesome description of a young girl "with a guard upon her lovely mouth, the bit's strong and stifling might, to stay a cry" (*Ag.* 235-7), pleading with her father before being gagged and killed, than it is on the safety of a community. How Agamemnon made his decision takes up twenty-three lines and the story of the actual sacrifice only twenty. Both reports are brief but have important resonance when Clytemnestra revisits the event after she kills Agamemnon as justification for his murder (*Ag.* 1415-20, 1431-3, 1503-4, 1521-9).

Unlike Iphigenia's sacrifice in the *Agamemnon*, the sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena, in *Hecuba*, is told in full detail by the Greek Talthybius (*Hec.* 518-82). The sacrifice of Polyxena occurs nearly halfway through the play after the rising action of the chief characters moves the action towards the inevitable and known outcome — the sacrifice of Polyxena. Talthybius reports on Polyxena's sacrifice for 64 lines. His news is masked first by his own feelings about having to relate the news to a grieving mother, but then he gives graphic detail of the off-stage action from his own eyewitness account to both Hecuba and the audience. The facts are reported chronologically in a clear and direct manner only pausing to recount Polyxena's last words before resuming to describe how the soldiers respected the dead body. Talthybius ends by addressing Hecuba telling her he sees her "with

blessings beyond all women in your children” even though she has had such bad fortune (*Hec.* 581-2). This report, in a slow and controlled way, giving much detail of the action, invokes a high level of visualisation and imagination of the off-stage sacrifice for the audience. It is full of compassion for the daughter of the enemy of Greece (*Hec.* 525) describing both her beauty (*Hec.* 560-2) and her bravery (*Hec.* 568-70).⁵⁸ Indeed, Talthybius says, at the beginning of his report, how he was moved to tears standing at Polyxena’s grave (*Hec.* 519) — compassionate words that would have appeal to a sympathetic audience. This combination of controlled length of messenger speeches and their placement within the dramatic structure are important factors in audience response.

It is not just the reports by a Messenger of the young adults’ deaths that make the audience aware of their suffering and the suffering of their parents. The playwrights use other devices such as the silent presence of the young adults on stage to portray the *pathos* of their situation. The conversation between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra when Clytemnestra realises she has brought Iphigenia to Aulis to be sacrificed and not married (*IA.* 1115-1210), and the decision Creon faces when he is told his son is to be sacrificed (*Phoen.* 931-52) both take place when their children are on stage and can hear their future being discussed by their parents. Although this

⁵⁸ (Collard, 1991, p.158). The idea of Polyxena’s courage is intimated here in preparation for Hecuba’s proud reply (*Hec.* 590-602) in which, although she expresses great sorrow at the death of her daughter, is also a reflection on Polyxena’s nobility (*Hec.* 592) and upbringing (*Hec.* 599) associated with a royal princess. The word for nobility (γενναῖος) is used at least two hundred and six times in the works of Homer (*TLG*). In tragedy it is also used in an aristocratic context to describe, for example: by Theseus to describe his son’s noble actions as Hippolytus lies dying (*Hipp.* 1452); by Heracles to describe how he admires Admetus’ noble hospitality (*Alc.* 857) and to describe Aegeus when he offers Medea sanctuary (*Med.* 762).

portrays the young adult in a conventional social/family manner, it also connotes an eerie process of rising tension as it shows the future victim listening to its destiny.

More directly, in *Phoenician Women*, Menoeceus, having brought the blind Teiresias onto the stage, is told by his father Creon to stay and listen silently to the old man's prophecy (*Phoen.* 905-14). Although initially Creon believes Menoeceus is pleased to hear how their city can be saved (*Phoen.* 910), when he realises his son must die "for the sake of the country" (*Phoen.* 913) he questions Teiresias and urges him to give more detail (*Phoen.* 915-29). Creon is silent during the following thirty lines that Teiresias takes to explain the prophecy. The Chorus ask Creon why he is so silent, "slackening utterance in speechlessness?" (*Phoen.* 960). Creon, expressing only fatherly love for his son, and with no declared concern for his city, believes no father can condemn his son to death (*Phoen.* 966). Creon offers, like Hecuba (*Hec.* 385), his own life to save that of his child (*Phoen.* 969). Menoeceus, meanwhile, has waited silently on stage for one hundred and forty four lines while his father and Teiresias debate his future. Again this eerie foretelling in the presence of the victim and the witnessing of the audience increases tension and anticipation of the oncoming climax.

Euripides' Iphigenia is also on stage to hear her father admit she will be sacrificed where she remains obediently silent, holding her baby brother Orestes, her head down and her face covered with a cloth (*IA.* 1122-3). The cloth protects Iphigenia's youth and her brother Orestes while her father admits he must sacrifice Iphigenia to Artemis. For the next eighty-five lines she listens to her mother and father argue before she supplicates herself in front of her father to plead for her life. Ironically, as a reminder of Iphigenia's vulnerability and defencelessness, when she is brought into the grove to be sacrificed, Agamemnon hides his face to conceal his

guilt (*IA*. 1550). This attempt to ‘hide away’ on stage also occurs in *The Children of Heracles* when Iolaus sits down by the altar grieving, after Demophon has taken Macaria for sacrifice. The sons of Heracles cover Iolaus’ head with his robe so that he can hide his grief as Macaria is taken away (*Heracl.* 603). A garment also covers Polyxena’s head as she is led away by Odysseus (*Hec.* 432) so her mother cannot see her face. In each case, even though the characters would have worn masks, the character whose face is ‘veiled’ is hidden from sight of the other characters and the audience. This takes the emphasis off the concealed character while keeping them on stage and also highlights the actions of the other characters.⁵⁹

Silence is not always passive — it can be enforced. One of the most striking silences is one demanded by Aeschylus’ Agamemnon when it is reported by the Chorus that he ordered his men to gag Iphigenia so she could no longer call him father as a plea to save her life (*Ag.* 235-7). All she can do is look at “her sacrificers with a glance from her eyes beseeching pity” (*Ag.* 240). Iphigenia’s silent look, together with her expression of fear portrays the *pathos* of her approaching death. This violent silence is combined with another important internal aspect of the dramatic structure.

Gestures play an important part in the dramatic structure and the highlighting of the young adult’s situation. Gestures can happen between members of the same family, outsiders (i.e. foreigners) and friends, or outsiders and their enemies. A gesture from one person in a family towards another can not only have significance but also evoke strong emotional response. In *Hecuba*, Hecuba says to Polyxena

⁵⁹ Polyxena’s face is hidden to hide her death. Macaria’s wish that Iolaus should cover her body with a robe when she is dead (*Heracl.* 561) is similar to the request of the dying Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 1458). See Macintosh for the victim whose sacrifice is not witnessed (Macintosh, 1994, p.139).

“stretch out your hand, give it me;” (*Hec.* 438) just before Polyxena is led away by Odysseus to be sacrificed.⁶⁰ This gesture of a mother trying to reach out and touch her daughter is particularly and sadly poignant as this is the last time Hecuba sees her daughter alive.

In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the second Chorus welcome the royal family to Aulis. Clytemnestra, Iphigenia and Orestes arrive in a chariot (*IA.* 590) and Clytemnestra asks Iphigenia to put her “dainty foot safely upon the ground” (*IA.* 605). This gesture is an obvious reference to Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* when Agamemnon is asked to step down from his chariot and place his foot (the foot that metaphorically defeated Troy (*Ag.* 905-7)) on the carpet Clytemnestra has placed at the entrance to the palace. In comparison to the masculine placing of Agamemnon’s foot on the carpet, the placing of Euripides’ Iphigenia’s delicate foot on the ground at Aulis portrays the fragility of a young girl, still in her mother’s care, and the concern a mother has for her daughter. When Iphigenia sees her father she kneels before him and grasps his chin reminding him she was his first child and how he had put her on his knee and shown concern for her future as any father would (*IA.* 1223-8). Her gestures fulfil the ritual requirements of complete supplication, but there is no reciprocity from Agamemnon.⁶¹ When her supplication fails Iphigenia begs for her life and uses the silent presence of her baby brother Orestes to support further supplication to keep their family intact (*IA.* 1241-52). However, even though Iphigenia is still a young girl

⁶⁰ The act of supplication “seeks a *reciprocal* act on the part of him to whom it is addressed, above and beyond the concepts of reciprocity which are built into the structure of Greek social relationships” (Gould, 1973, p.75). Gould later suggests the suppliant’s first contact is aggressive and that an act of supplication can also involve hands as in Priam’s supplication to Achilles in the *Iliad* (*Il.* XXIV.476-8). Gould suggests that “supplication is a ritualised inversion of normal social behaviour, that is combative self assertion” (Gould, 2001, p.77).

⁶¹ (Gould, 1973, pp.76-7).

her pleas do not change Agamemnon's mind — his motivation as a war-king overrules his fatherly instinct or responsibility.

Another form of supplication occurs when one person approaches another and seeks sanctuary at an altar. On behalf of the sons of Heracles Iolaus kneels at Demophon's feet in supplication (*Herac.* 224-35), pleading with him to take the young boys into his protection (*Herac.* 228). Iolaus clings to Demophon's knees and chin⁶² before being helped physically to his feet by Demophon who assures him the boys will not be taken forcibly from the sanctuary of the altar of Zeus. This gesture by Demophon is a sign of acceptance, but taken with concern that his decision is seen not only to be just by his people⁶³, but also not a challenge to Zeus who functions both as the god of hospitality and as presiding over supplicants.⁶⁴ His reasons are explained in an exchange with the Herald before a grateful Iolaus tells the boys and their new friends (the Chorus) to hold hands (*Herac.* 307). This supplication between equals has been successful and is a gesture of friendship acknowledging Athens "alone in the whole inhabited expanse of Greece" (*Herac.* 304) as the defender of children.⁶⁵

There is another form of supplication and gesture in *Hecuba* that is from one person towards an enemy and involves no physical contact. Hecuba tries to persuade Odysseus not to sacrifice her daughter. Appealing to him for pity, she reminds him of the supplication he once made to her (*Hec.* 245, 274) not to reveal his identity when

⁶² This physical contact has a ritual element binding both the suppliant and the person being supplicated (Gould, 1973, p.77).

⁶³ (Allan, 2001a, p.151).

⁶⁴ (Gould, 1973, p.92).

⁶⁵ The holding of hands occurs also when a grieving Iolaus asks the boys to hold him and help him sit down by the altar after Macaria has left to be sacrificed (*Herac.* 602-4).

he was caught spying in Troy by Helen (*Hec.* 239-41).⁶⁶ When this appeal for reciprocity does not work, Hecuba urges Polyxena to supplicate herself at “the knees of Odysseus” (*Hec.* 338). Odysseus hides his right hand under his cloak and turns his face away so that Polyxena cannot touch his beard (*Hec.* 341-3). As there is no contact, the supplication cannot be completed, and Polyxena is dismissed. All she can do is comfort her mother and justify why she will go with Odysseus (*Hec.* 351-67); her sacrifice now inevitable because her supplication could not be fulfilled.

An Athenian audience involved in supplication at public altars would have recognized the rituals of a ‘dramatic’ suppliant’s approach to a person or altar: making contact, making a request and receiving a decision from a priest or the community.⁶⁷ For successful suppliants such as Iolaus in *The Children of Heracles* and the Maidens in Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* the “‘insider’ extends his protection”⁶⁸ — an attitude towards helping strangers Athenians in the audience would recognise. For the defenceless Iphigenia and Polyxena, ‘outsiders’ in that they are both young adults with no rights of their own (Polyxena is also a slave by conquest), their supplication constitutes behaviour that is outside socially equal relationships — their supplications fail, their plight is highlighted and their suffering enhances the *pathos* of their situation.

⁶⁶ Gould describes the “face to face” supplication Hecuba makes to Odysseus as “‘figurative’” (Gould, 1973, pp.84-5) and if contact does not occur Gould describes it as “metaphorical supplication” (Gould, 2001, p.77).

⁶⁷ (Naiden, 2006, p.173). In Aeschylus’ *The Suppliants* the king listens to the Maidens’ supplications at the altar of Zeus, the protector of suppliants (*Supp.* 176-203). First the king refuses their supplication but in a democratic move the Argive people decide in the Maidens’ favour and to protect them from their barbarous Egyptian pursuers. See F.S. Naiden’s Chapter 1 ‘Yes and No’ pp.3-28 for a discussion of Gould’s article ‘Hiketeia’ and Chapter 4 ‘Supplication and Greek Law’ pp.171-218 for a discussion on supplication in Classical Athens (Naiden, 2006).

⁶⁸ (Gould, 1973, p.94).

The literary form — the words (and the rhythms used) chosen by the playwrights to describe the young adults — influences the way their vulnerability is portrayed. How and when the playwrights reveal the dramatic action, when the young adults speak, forms part of the dramatic function and structures of speech and are part of an “elevated style suitable to the gravity of the dramatic situation”.⁶⁹ The audience is told that the deaths of the young adults are wrong in the case of Iphigenia, Polyxena and Erechtheus’ daughters. Iphigenia’s sacrifice is lawless (*Ag.* 151). It is a sacrifice without the usual music or eating associated with animal sacrifices. In *Trojan Women* Polyxena’s death is also described as “unholy” (*Tro.* 628) as is the sacrifice of Erechtheus’ daughters (*Erec.* 370.41). The type of words used to describe what is about to happen to the young adults has already conditioned the audience.

The words that describe their characters are also important. They do not necessarily add to the characterization of the individuals but they help to shape the impact of the dramatic action. A representative type in Greek tragedy, such as a young adult, is defined by certain words that differentiate the character in age and gender from the other characters. Words can evoke an emotional response as well as portray different points of view and principles associated with their deaths. For instance, the use of emotive gestures describing their fragility heightens the *pathos* of their situation because it describes them as young and in need of protection (e.g. Iolaus tells the boys to “take hold of my clothes” (*Heracl.* 48) when the Herald arrives). Metaphors, linked to the natural world, liken the young adults to the young of animals still in the ‘nest’ and have a different emotive effect than the animal

⁶⁹ (Sifakis, 1979, p.72).

metaphors used to describe the emotional positioning of the young adults before they are sacrificed.

In *Agamemnon* the first song (*parodos*) of the Chorus warns of the loss of the eagles' children from the nest (*Ag.* 50-3) — a metaphor not just for Iphigenia (or the House of Atreus), but also for all the children killed in the Trojan War.⁷⁰ This metaphor is the antithesis of the descriptive simile of the eagles (*Ag.* 49) — a symbol for Agamemnon and Menelaus — whose reported “wailing scream” (*Ag.* 57) to the audience must have represented a warlike image of the two men.⁷¹

At the beginning of *Hecuba*, Polyxena, a young girl who has been looked after by her mother, is “flushed ... from the house like a bird” (*Hec.* 179).⁷² Here she is described as being young and afraid (*Hec.* 184) but, later, as she leaves her mother to go to her sacrifice she becomes the ‘protector’ (more adult) telling her mother to “accept what I say” (*Hec.* 402) and embracing her for the last time (*Hec.* 409). It may not be plausible to an audience that a young girl addresses her mother in this way, but the loving gesture of a daughter holding her mother and putting “cheek to lay to cheek” (*Hec.* 409) convincingly suggests, to the audience, a tender and affectionate relationship.⁷³

⁷⁰ (Kitto, 1956, p.5).

⁷¹ When Agamemnon returns home as sole commander, without Menelaus, he believes himself “the Argive beast” (*Ag.* 823). Such symbolic and animalistic images only add to the description of a heroic warlike character capable, against all given social and religious conventions, of sacrificing his own defenceless daughter.

⁷² In the prologue Polyxena's brother Polydorus is like a “sapling” (*Hec.* 20). This simile portrays his youth but also his potential to grow, which is removed from him in the next sentence by the knowledge his father's friend will kill him for his money (*Hec.* 20-6). The association of tender young shoots and youth is also used to describe the newly born Dionysos in *Phoenician Women* (*Phoen.* 652-3).

⁷³ Role reversal also occurs when Hecuba who has been portrayed as a loving and grieving mother protecting her young becomes a murderer of Polymestor's children (*Hec.* 1159-63).

The bird metaphor to describe the young is also found in *The Children of Heracles*. The boys, on stage for the duration of the play, are “a gathering of fledglings” (*Heracl.* 239) and Iolaus has “taken these children beneath [his] wing” (*Heracl.* 10). The boys’ youth and their need of protection from danger, like baby birds in a nest, has the effect of gaining the audience’s sympathy for this threatened family at the beginning of the play. This effect is also used in *Iphigenia in Aulis* when Iphigenia describes her baby brother as a “mere babe” (*IA.* 1248) hoping his silence will aid her in supplicating their father to prevent her sacrifice.

The need to protect children from danger is also portrayed in the way words are assembled or delivered. When Creon and Menoeceus exchange a fast dialogue in half line measures (*Phoen.* 980-5) they are talking in a way that portrays the tension between a father desperate to send his young son (*Phoen.* 841) to safety and a son anxious to know where and how he can be protected, knowing all the time that he cannot free himself from the prophecy, and will give his life to save his city (*Phoen.* 990-1017). This short exchange is the last contact between father and son and it has poignancy because, thinking his son will live, Creon does not know his son will disobey him. The tragic moment is conveyed in its incompleteness — there can be no goodbye scene as in *Hecuba* or *Iphigenia in Aulis* between child and parent.

Another mechanism used to create emotional response is the choral ode.⁷⁴ The Greeks upheld the “emotional power” of music commonly in the form of song.⁷⁵ The words, lyric meters, together with music and dancing (often accompanied by a

⁷⁴ There are possibilities of comparison between odes, messenger speeches and verbal interactions as perspectives and triggers of audience response.

⁷⁵ (Stanford, 1983, pp.49-50). Stanford’s evidence is from the myth of Orpheus, Homeric poems and Hesiod’s *Theogony*. When a man hears the songs of a poet “he forgets his sorrows at once” (*Theog.* 98-103) (Stanford, 1983, p.50).

person playing the aulos) were not only a musical interval dividing high emotional exchanges between the characters, but also a means of setting the pace of the play, providing comment for audience reflection, explaining and examining the action of the protagonists and providing background information.⁷⁶ A function of the Chorus, is to convey the intensity of the situation and also manage to hold the position of spectator, as well as acting as a link between the actions on stage and the audience.⁷⁷

There are three choral odes in *Hecuba* (*Hec.* 444-83, 629-56, 905-51). Although each provides background ‘scenery’ for the audience (describing the effects of war on communities) they are all also sad and emotive descriptions of the heartbreaking and often depressing situation the Trojans find themselves in. In this way the odes provide an alternative side to the Greek experiences of war — the enemy’s perspective and suffering. Euripides uses powerful imagery of the sea and wind to portray how anxious women will be sold into slavery and misery (*Hec.* 444-83). In the second ode the blame for the suffering of the Trojans is placed on Paris’ abduction of Helen and highlights the people’s “common misery from private folly” (*Hec.* 639). This ode occurs after a serving woman has been sent for water so that Hecuba can bathe her dead daughter and immediately before the dead body of Hecuba’s son is brought on stage. This positioning gives time to allow the audience

⁷⁶ (Barlow, 1996b, p.xviii). The impact of the physicality of dance is also portrayed by the Furies in the *Eumenides* when they surround Orestes calling for his death in an “agitated display of ritualized violence” (Henrichs, 1995, p.61). See also Zarifi for discussion on choral dance in tragedy (Zarifi, 2007, pp.234-7).

⁷⁷ (Wiles, 2000, pp.125, 142). Hall says the Choruses, although “the voice of the collective” is also “estranged from the central *pathos*” (Hall, 1991, p.115). Because the Chorus remains on the edge of the action its position is inferior and it can only “sympathize and lament” (Hall, 1991, p.115). There are, however, occasions where the lyric exchanges between Chorus and main characters moves the action along and the chorus therefore is an agent in developing the main character’s perceptions. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the Chorus functions as part of the reasoning process of Oedipus. The Chorus is supportive (*OT.* 294, 508), uncertain about what has happened to Oedipus (*OT.* 617, 695) and commiserates with him at the end of the play (*OT.* 1216).

to reflect on the death of Polyxena, “providing a sort of philosophical pause in highly poetic form”;⁷⁸ it is a breathing space between the two events emphasising not just Hecuba’s grief but also the waste of life that war causes.

In *Agamemnon* the meditative ‘Hymn to Zeus’ (*Ag.* 160-83) by a Chorus of elders from Argos forms “an organic part of the surrounding narrative”⁷⁹ leading to the report of Agamemnon’s decision and the sacrifice of his daughter. This is an emotionally and morally introspective passage. The Chorus reflects from a religious standpoint stating a more traditional view of an all-powerful Zeus but finding it difficult to understand what is happening between gods and humans. The Chorus finds it hard to rationalise how a young girl can be sacrificed for a righteous cause.⁸⁰ There is no answer and leads only into the report of Iphigenia’s sacrifice and so the first disturbing and emotional part of the play.

In *Iphigenia in Aulis* the choral singing of the second Chorus, which consists of men or women of Argos, who arrive with Clytemnestra, Iphigenia and the baby Orestes, announces the grand entrance of the royals who bring gifts for “a good marriage” (*IA.* 608) between Achilles and Iphigenia. The Chorus sings of its concern for the happiness and safety of Iphigenia and Clytemnestra (*IA.* 590-606) expressing the hope that the young Iphigenia is treated “softly and gently” in case she “takes fright” (*IA.* 600-1). The audience know already that Iphigenia has been brought to Aulis under the pretence of marrying Achilles and will be sacrificed by her father (*IA.* 80-114). The Chorus’ lack of knowledge and false optimism at this point induces

⁷⁸ (Barlow, 1996b, p.xviii).

⁷⁹ (Fraenkel, 1950, p.114).

⁸⁰ The problematic relationship between Chorus and protagonist is also portrayed in *Oedipus Tyrannus* when the Chorus says, “why should we honour the gods with dances?” (*OT.* 896).

an emotional response of sympathy and compassion towards an unknowing Iphigenia and her mother. Varying this level of expression and understanding can place the audience at different positions of knowing. A well-informed Chorus whose understanding of the situation matches that of the audience will provide a sense of comfort and satisfaction. On the other hand a badly informed Chorus, out of step with the common ground of knowledge available to the audience, will be immediately unsettling. If this is coupled with the Chorus being uninformed about occurrences past, present or future in the action of the play then a stated tension is aroused in the audience which heightens their sense of anticipation and foreboding.

In *The Children of Heracles* the Chorus, who are old men of Marathon (a nostalgic and reflective reminder to some members of the audience who participated in the Battle of Marathon), initially appear as a happy collective of ordinary citizens joyous about the victorious battle and convinced that the gods have been honoured and that justice has been done (*Heracl.* 901-5). The second song, however, coming before Demophon's important statement that no one should ever hand over their beloved children to be sacrificed (*Heracl.* 413), and again setting the scene for the dramatic impact of a young adult being chosen as a sacrifice, is directed not just to the audience but to the Herald too. Here, the Chorus is not so joyous. It is more vehement in its outrage against a foreigner trying to force the young boys away from the altar — an attitude with which the Athenian citizens in the audience would empathize. The Chorus set the stage for the plot to develop as well as evoke the audience's response to the plight of the children at the hands of foreigners. The fifth song of the Chorus makes an interesting comparison. It explains that dancing is a good thing, as is the music of the "flute" (*Heracl.* 892) and the kindness of

Aphrodite, but what is particularly good is the fortune of Macaria's brothers who are now their friends (*Heracl.* 892-7).

Messenger speeches, silence, gestures, language used and choral odes are all elements within the causative connection of events of the plot, playing their part in the internal aspects of dramatic structure increasing tension, enhancing *pathos*, and identifying recognisable religious, family and social conventions. Combined they have the effect of creating a conflict between what is happening on stage to the young adults and what is happening to young adults in Athenian society — a tension which in itself has implications for the response of the Athenian audience.

Themes borrowed from the myths such as human sacrifice or religious practices concerning young adults become part of the audience's transformed experience, embracing conflict with the cultural traditions and expectations of fifth century Athenian religious practices. It is possible that an audience drawn from a society that considered human sacrifice a thing of the past,⁸¹ and where social values placed highly the wellbeing and maintenance of the family for the success of the new democracy, would be affected by such portrayals. In this case, these plays present a 'shocking' alternative world to that of the new democracy. The history of the myths in their portrayal of heroic brutality counterpoints the increasingly central role of the city's religious and moral authority and the part this plays in the consciousness of the Athenian citizen. It follows that portrayal of conduct contrary to these established and ascendant values — to produce children, care for them, and educate them to be

⁸¹ Although there are instances of human sacrifice in ancient literature, especially in Herodotus' *The Histories*, Hughes points out Herodotus' use of "*sphazein*" to describe sacrificial victims can, by the fifth century BC, "also be applied to particularly brutal but non-sacrificial killings of human beings" (Hughes, 1991, p.9).

part of the developing *polis* — had high impact.⁸² The plays pose questions about hierarchy, power, revenge and deceit but they also challenge the fundamentals of family love and affinity and care for those within the family environment. The portrayal of human sacrifice in the plays provides a background against which members of the audience may question their own society and family environment from the “standpoint of extreme abnormality, all the more freely since this abnormality is so flagrant”.⁸³

⁸² This view is part of Golden’s general proposal that “Athenians loved their children and grieved for them deeply when they died” (M. Golden, 1993, p.89). This idea underpins a central supposition in this chapter — that Athenian citizens would have been affected by the idea of young adults being sacrificed in the plays. In general terms social responses to conduct outlawed or suspended (e.g. killing of children) is often one of repugnance or at least indignation.

⁸³ (Loraux, 1987, p.32).

3 PARENTS KILLING CHILDREN

ὀρθῶς, ἀνάγκη δυστυχεῖν τοὺς ἐκγόνους.

When the very foundation of a family is not laid down soundly,
then the descendants inevitably suffer.

(HF. 1261)

3.1 Introduction

Killing children in Greek tragedy is associated with intense family relationships and complex psychological issues. One aspect of this is the killing of children as the result of a parent's altered frame of mind. The full dramatic potential of this type of child killing is realised in Euripides' *Medea*, *Heracles* and the *Bacchae*, where various psychological states of the murderous parents are explored.¹ Such killings prove to be at a high cost to the unity of the family structure (involving parents, siblings, and grandparents who are influential to a greater or lesser extent),² in which

¹ A reworking of the myths intensifies this theme. In *Medea*, performed in 431 BC, the children are deliberately killed by their mother and, at the end of the play, Medea flies away in a chariot (Mossman, 2011, p.8). In *Heracles*, performed sometime before 415 BC, Heracles kills his sons after his labours, not before (Barlow, 1996a, p.1). The *Bacchae* was performed after Euripides' death in 406 BC. Seaford suggests it is unwise to accept that Euripides invented the act of filicide because what survives of the myth may only represent a small version of what might have once existed, not only in written and spoken literature but also in fragments and pots (Seaford, 1996, p.27).

² Zeus is the immortal grandfather of Heracles' children. Amphytryon, their human grandfather, appeals to Zeus to save the children but realises his efforts are to no avail as their deaths seem unavoidable (HF. 339-47, 498-508, 886). Heracles does arrive soon after this to save his family. The

the children, if allowed to live, could have played a significant part. The children killed are males from aristocratic families. The young sons of Medea and Heracles only speak a few lines so any voiced opinions, relevant in the last chapter, are absent here. Even though Pentheus in the *Bacchae* has a main speaking part, it is the nature of the children's deaths and the mental state of their parents that confronts the audience. Their tragic deaths prevent the continuation of the *oikos* and passing on of family wealth. This has the effect of problematizing fifth century BC Athenian thinking, where male heirs could inherit and continue the family name and bring it honour.³

It is in these plays, with the apparent conflict between rational and irrational forces, that something of human nature, which is both immune from yet subject to the power of the gods, is revealed. Human passions are explored in ways that chart an unstoppable course from conventional emotions to irrational states of mind. Pre-disposition, external influences and confusion all play a part in the irrational frenzy of madness. Madness is so powerful that its most extreme and overpowering manifestation is rooted in the divine. It can represent detachment from the 'normal' world. Hallucination can be an outcome or distraction brought on by the frenzy and intoxication of worship as for Agaue, or the preparation for battle as in the case of Heracles. Yet, for all that, it is found deeply embedded in human nature — an evil

implication is that perhaps Zeus did hear Amphitryon's prayer (Mastronarde, 2010, p.167-8). Even less help is given by the god Helios, the grandfather of Medea, who does nothing to save Medea's children even though the Chorus appeal to him (*Med.* 1251-7). Helios does, however, save Medea by sending a chariot so she can escape from her enemies (*Med.* 1320-1). Kadmos, the human grandfather of both Pentheus and Dionysos, also has no influence over either of his grandchildren (*Bacch.* 45, 343), but does devote himself totally to his daughter and her state of mind after she has killed Pentheus (*Bacch.* 1244-50).

³ If an Athenian man died without leaving a will and had no sons then a daughter (*epikleros*) was required to marry her nearest male relative (*epidikasia*) in order to produce sons who could become legal heirs (Foley, 2003, pp.68-70).

part of the human condition and an illustration of the extreme forms of moral degradation of which humans are capable.

The degrading forces of madness oppose the ideal of parental love, which — though voiced and sometimes running alongside the will to kill those that are loved — is ultimately overcome by the greater force of madness. Parental love is a given within the family contexts portrayed in the plays but it is easily corrupted by the desire for revenge by Medea or the more powerful divine intervention in *Heracles* and the *Bacchae*; and both revenge and the divine can sometimes act as mitigations for the murderous act.⁴ For Heracles and Agaue, remorse and sorrow are outcomes of the irresistible act of parents killing their children; for Medea the outcome is another form of madness. The confrontation of murderous parent and child can generate high levels of *pathos* only possible because of the vulnerable position and status of the victims.

Dramatically, love is placed alongside other strong human emotions such as anger, jealousy or hatred. It is these to which love loses out as the internal madness of the murderous parent feeds on the powerful claims made by their driving power. Always too, there is the presence of divine influence, either as an overpowering force, a reason for confusion, a cause to carry out certain rituals and rights, or a justification for delusion. Euripides uses an array of dramatic devices to accentuate the portrayal of these features and the ultimate killing itself is presented in ways that reinforce the horror of the killing and the pathetic vulnerability of the children involved.

⁴ Luschnig sees *Medea* as a play about revenge, but also about justice (Luschnig, 2007, p.83).

The crime of parents killing children, although enacted by humans, is only possible when driven by divine influence. The outcomes vary, remorse and guilt for Heracles and Agaue representing understandable psychology, but the divinity too, in the case of Medea, can absolve the crime by elevation to its own inculpable ranks.

3.2 Greek 'madness' and its relationship to filicide

Oedipus, after realising he has mistakenly killed his father and married his mother, responds with an inescapable 'madness' of a conventional psychological sort (i.e. a behavioural aberration to the norm brought on by guilt as opposed to some sort of wild frenzy, passion or ecstasy).⁵ Aeschylus' Orestes, after killing his mother Clytemnestra, also suffers from guilt and is attacked by the unbearably horrific chimera of Erinyes (*Cho.* 1061-2).⁶ This delusional onset of 'madness' after the murder is absent in Euripides and Sophocles' *Electra*.⁷

For Medea, Heracles and Agaue who are involved in killing their children the situation is more complex. Before they kill their children they have been driven to commit murder by unconventional forms of 'madness' (*Med.* 1129), (*HF.* 835) and (*Bacch.* 1295). In the case of Heracles and Agaue by external divine forces and for

⁵ The Chorus comment that madness has come to Oedipus in the form of misery and unhappiness (*OT.* 1297-1306) and Oedipus feels condemned to intolerable regret and remorse (*OT.* 1313-18). Burkert gives a general definition of madness as "frenzy, not as the ravings of delusion, but, as its etymological connection with *menos* would suggest, as an experience of intensified mental power" (Burkert, 1987, p.162). Padel argues that *menos* means "'force'" and is "fundamentally angry, but *not* fundamentally 'mental'". She believes, therefore, that madness has the "sudden violence of a 'fit of madness'" (Padel, 1995, p.20). The tragedians who explored the causes for their character's self-destruction used madness as a crucial component.

⁶ In Sophocles' *Electra* there is a hint of future evils such as the Furies (*S. El.* 1498). In Euripides' *Electra* there is a threat of the Furies arriving if Orestes does not go into exile to Athens for protection (*S. El.* 1250-7). Neither, however, materialise in the same way as the Furies in *The Libation Bearers*.

⁷ Madness is present in Euripides' *Orestes* at lines 37, 228, 270, 326, 400 and 835.

Medea a darker more terrifying internal force that has divine qualities. The outcomes (especially for Heracles and Agaue), however, are of conventional remorse together with a new and sometimes deeply tormenting insight. To form a full picture of the role of children in *Medea*, *Heracles* and the *Bacchae*, and to understand how this is part of a dramatic structure that highlights the important role of children as part of a revealing psychological narrative, it is necessary to clarify what the Greeks of this time meant by ‘madness’.

Unconventional Greek ‘madness’ appears in a number of forms. The ancient Greek psychology can be seen as being rational and irrational at the same time — rational in that the Greeks thought in a deductive way and accepted abstract concepts to guide their views, irrational in that they accepted without question the effect of divine power as a force of nature and as a direct influence on not only the world in general but in the manner of their thinking.⁸ The paradox — the rational including the irrational — and the idea that the rational sets the seed for its own doom, provides a broad perspective against which this dramatic ‘madness’ is played out, where human instinct and reverence for the divine collapses under the strain of those very influences and destroys the perpetrators in the process.

In *Medea*, *Heracles* and the *Bacchae*, Euripides presents humans in jeopardy of madness. This condition (whether divinely induced or not) is a threatening force, prevalent and even expected. The Nurse’s speech, at the beginning of *Medea*, prepares the audience for the possibility that Medea — already a “wretched” woman — is suicidal and might harm her children (*Med.* 36-40). The Nurse says Medea

⁸ Essentially Dodds’ argument (Dodds, 1951, pp.1, 254).

hates her children (*Med.* 36).⁹ On the face of it this is a sort of Freudian ‘displacement’ where a substitute object is chosen as a replacement target for feelings — Medea’s hatred for Jason is transferred to her children. But this is not the case — Medea arrives at the situation already pre-disposed to madness. Medea had a raging heart (*Med.* 432) when she left her father’s house after instigating the murder of Pelias by his daughters (*Med.* 9) and killing her brother (*Med.* 166-7). Already an exile from her own country she now fears being abandoned in a country that is foreign to her, rejected by a husband who has married another woman and the consequent loss of status for both herself and her children that this brings (*Med.* 17-35).

Medea’s need to exact revenge on Jason is driven by reasons that appear rational. In her role as Jason’s wife she believes she has done nothing wrong (*Med.* 10-15) so there is strong justification for feeling badly treated. Consequently, Medea displays symptoms of misery and depression — loss of appetite, tears, lethargy and solitude together with a hatred for the children who remind her of their father (*Med.* 24-36, 96-7). However, she moves rapidly from this conventional state of mind to another more dangerous and passionate one of great rage and anger (*Med.* 90-5). Her distress and fears for herself and her children are downgraded and replaced with a strength and purpose that will ultimately lead to punishing Jason who has caused her suffering.

The Nurse warns the children about their mother’s passions, her “fierce character and the hateful nature of her stubborn mind” (*Med.* 100-10) that will

⁹ The Nurse’s speech here has some parallel to the Nurse’s speech in Aeschylus’ *The Libation Bearers* (*Cho.* 734-65). Both Nurses claim a feeling of love for the children in their charge. Even so, parents have a particular bond with their children as expressed by Hecuba when she pleads with Odysseus not to kill her daughter Polyxena (*Hec.* 385).

undoubtedly lead her to a more irrational decision — to commit filicide (*Med.* 849). This, therefore, is no simple displacement. The hatred for her children is generated by her hatred for Jason but not because she transfers that hatred to the children, but instead because she sees the ‘innocent’ children as a product of a love now corrupted by her unfaithful husband and the vehicle for the greatest harm she can bring to him. Distancing herself from both her husband and her children she says, “accursed children of a hateful mother, may you perish with your father and the whole house come to nothing” (*Med.* 113-4).

In *Heracles*, the madness of Heracles is caused ‘externally’. Iris announces that Lyssa (sent by the goddess Hera) will put Heracles into a state of mind where he is “no longer himself” (*HF.* 932) and so kill his children (*HF.* 835-6).¹⁰ This occurs just after Heracles has arrived back home from his heroic labours in time to save his wife and children from being killed by their enemy Lycus (*HF.* 574-5). As a loving father and husband Heracles’ behaviour is rational as he gathers his family together, reassures them of their safety now that he is with them and leads them into the house (*HF.* 622-32). Heracles then kills Lycus — punishment for his crime against Heracles’ family (*HF.* 756). The murder of Lycus is an understandable form of retribution that, for a father and warrior, still appears a rational act. It is not a direct act of self-defence but more a ‘preventative’ murder in that, in Heracles’ mind, this one immoral act will prevent another he believes worse — the murder of his family.

It appears that the gods condone Heracles’ act. The Chorus says the gods have listened to Heracles and that men who are “corrupt” can never escape divine

¹⁰ See Riley’s Chapter 1 ‘No longer himself’: the tragic fall of Euripides’ Herakles’ for a comprehensive discussion on the madness of Heracles (Riley, 2008, pp.14-50).

vengeance (*HF*. 772-80).¹¹ Having ‘heroically’ saved his family from certain death, based on such ethically rational principles, it seems perverse that Heracles is immediately driven mad by the deity Lyssa to commit the irrational act of killing the children he loves (*HF*. 636) and has just saved. Heracles was already showing some signs of madness before Lyssa arrived when he exhibited breathlessness, shaking his head and rolling his eyes (*HF*. 867-70),¹² but the onset of his physical change is very rapid; a point driven home as this change is equally matched by the speed of Lyssa running “races into Heracles’ heart” quicker than an “earthquake” or “thunderbolt” (*HF*. 861-3). Because of this, it is reasonable to suppose that his madness is divinely induced, that it is immediate and not connected to any rationally worked out view or chain of previous causes.¹³

There is a further accentuation of external influence in the *Bacchae* when Dionysos reveals that Agaue will kill her son while in a state of mad frenzy (*Bacch.* 857-61). The Chorus, prophetic about what is to follow, asks, “who then gave him birth?” (*Bacch.* 987) disputing that a human mother could have brought such a ‘bestly’ child into the world. The Chorus’ description of Pentheus, a man dressed as a woman spying on the Maenads, and a beast born from a lioness, is significant for Agaue’s delusion — she believes she is killing a lion, not her son. Pentheus’ madness will be exploited and enhanced by Dionysos and he will be punished by further madness — Agaue’s. Although Pentheus’ state of madness is derived from

¹¹ (Barlow, 1996a, p.158).

¹² (Kamerbeek, 1966, p.13).

¹³ Euripides introduces Lyssa half way through the play and, importantly, she is on stage before Heracles is driven ‘mad’, confirming his madness is externally driven as she invades his body and mind (*HF*. 834-5, 867-73). The deity is not in any other extant tragedy, and although Euripides describes what in modern terms is called epilepsy, it would seem his purpose was not “psychological realism” but to prepare the audience for Heracles’ madness to be an external force (Riley, 2008, p.31).

Dionysos, who has instructed the Chorus to “put him outside his mind”, and send him into a “light-headed frenzy” (*Bacch.* 850-1), the mental shift, unlike in the case of Heracles, has happened slowly and does not totally derive from the external senses and therefore the influence of the gods. The influence here of madness is partially inherited; it is not completely supernatural but more ‘sub-natural’. Like his mother Pentheus lives in a “primitive world of imagery”.¹⁴ The image of a more sub-natural ‘beast’ (*Bacch.* 1108) has great power and force, and an ability to confuse the state of mind to such an extent that human actions are altered. When Agaue prepares to kill the ‘lion’, Pentheus becomes aware of what is happening and supplicates his mother to recognise him (*Bacch.* 1118-21). Agaue is still in the irrational world of delusion driven by the “rushing hounds of Frenzy” (*Bacch.* 977) to behave, with her women, like hunting hounds as they track down and kill their prey (Pentheus). It is only after the murder that Agaue says she is “somehow coming to [her] senses” (*Bacch.* 1269-70) and experiences the more conventional and rationally comprehensible emotions of grief and remorse (*Bacch.* 1352-3).

Killing children is not the behaviour of caring parents towards their children. The illogical behaviour of Medea, Heracles and Agaue is an aberration from the norm, where reason (for all its abstract clarity) is prey to the powerful irrational force of madness.¹⁵ It is conventional, in contemporary times, to think of any form of madness as a mental aberration with some sort of psychological or physiological cause.¹⁶ Such causes will often mix together and be problematic to untangle or

¹⁴ (Winnington-Ingram, 1998, p.130).

¹⁵ (Dodds, 1951, p.64).

¹⁶ Ancient Greek mania cannot be regarded in the same way as madness in contemporary Western countries, which is more attributable to a clinical view of madness as a mental disease in need of a cure. However, Foucault in his examination of the meaning of madness in western civilisation from

sometimes even to make sense at all. All of these forms can be classified as ‘conventional’. The Greeks made a further distinction which can be called ‘unconventional’ and which they called ‘divine’. Plato makes this thinking clear in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates distinguishes between ordinary and divine madness¹⁷ — “one resulting from human ailments, the other from a divine disturbance of our conventions of conduct” (*Phdr.* 265.a).¹⁸ Socrates then classifies four types of divine madness each of which is associated with a god: prophetic with Apollo; mystic with Dionysus; poetic with the Muses; and the highest in his hierarchy of ‘blessings’ is the, “madness of the lover” to Aphrodite and Eros (*Phdr.* 265.b). Plato’s Socrates holds the madness of the lover the greatest form of madness because it has the greatest effect on our rational conduct. He says that the commonly held view that favour should be given to the one who does not love because he is not mad (with love) is wrong (*Phdr.* 244a-c). Instead the madness of the lover should be regarded as bringing about the greatest blessing.¹⁹ For Plato’s Socrates, the madness of love is, as the greatest blessing, capable of the most dramatic and aberrational influence on human behaviour.

‘Divine’ madness does not mean that it is somehow ‘distant’ or ‘beyond’ human experience — on the contrary, Greek divine madness could completely overtake and control both the mental and physical self. According to the Greeks,

1500 to 1800 gives an insight into melancholia and mania that has a clear parallel to the mental states of Euripides’ *Medea* (Foucault, 1985, pp.125-31).

¹⁷ A distinction already made by Herodotus who stated that Cleomenes’ madness and subsequent death was alcohol induced, not divine punishment (Hdt. VI.84).

¹⁸ The distinction between divine madness and one caused by disease is, “of course older than Plato” (Dodds, 1951, p.65). However, Plato may well also have reflected fifth century BC thinking.

¹⁹ Socrates says madness is connected to the very naming of art, though he points out that in his day the word has become corrupted, “manic” being altered by the addition of a letter to “mantic” (*Phdr.* 244a-c).

emotions and impulses invaded their organs from the ‘outside’ — in an everyday sense such sensations brought them sight and sound and in the divine sense of madness, altered states of consciousness.²⁰ In other words, madness derives from external sensations; it in no way derives from ‘conventional’ psychological or physiological states although clearly divine madness can manifest itself in either. Like any psychological condition, it has degrees. Divine intervention causing hallucinatory or delusional insanity or at its peak epilepsy or seizure was considered a “‘sacred disease’”.²¹ Both Euripides’ *Heracles* and *Agave* exhibit such physical symptoms — a contorted face, bloodshot rolling eyes and a foaming mouth (*HF*. 931-5 and *Bacch.* 1122-4).²² Under such influence and unable to think, clearly they mistakenly kill their children.

Extreme madness (what in contemporary thinking could be termed “psychotic delusion”²³) could lead to being mistaken about identities. The madness *Heracles* experiences (externally from the deity *Lyssa*) is the type associated with a “berserk state of mind”,²⁴ one that can be linked to the state of mind the hero has when he enters the battlefield. And so, like a warrior hero, *Heracles* calls for his bow and club (*HF*. 942-3) as he purposely advances towards his children and wife failing to realise their true identity. Thinking they are the children of his enemy *Eurystheus*, *Heracles* kills his sons as he would an enemy in battle (*HF*. 942-9). His madness is driven by

²⁰ (Dodds, 1951, p.66).

²¹ This is Dodd’s explanation (Dodds, 1951, p.66).

²² See Euripides’ *Orestes* for a similar description of *Orestes* — “rolling bloodshed in his roving eyeballs” (*Or.* 835-7). Also in the *Iliad*, *Achilles* had a similar experience when he sinks into depression and fell to the ground covering his head in dust and tearing out his hair after hearing the news of *Patroclus*’ death (*Il.* XVIII.22-8).

²³ (Hall, 2010, p.184).

²⁴ (Hall, 2010, p.185).

Lyssa “the external representation of Herakles’ internal *mania*, a genuine mental distraction”²⁵ — for he would never knowingly kill his own children. Lyssa has, although reluctantly (*HF*. 858-9), cruelly exploited Heracles causing him to use weapons of violence that he would usually use in battle against children who could not defend themselves.

In the *Bacchae* it is again a different form of divine madness that makes Agaue kill her son Pentheus. She is a ‘Maenad’ in a euphoric state of disturbing uninhibited behaviour brought about by the worship of Dionysos. Her ‘crime’ was to slander her sister Semele, Dionysos’ mother, so questioning his divine parenthood (*Bacch.* 25-33). To offend Dionysos in this way is a ‘religious’ crime and one that required punishment. Agaue, therefore, becomes the human agent of Dionysos and, in her frenzied bacchant delirium, has no knowledge of her actions when she kills her son. That Euripides links the madness associated with parental killing with divinity in *Heracles* and the *Bacchae* is not surprising as it is this accepted quality that allows the madness required for the killings to be distinguished from common irrational ‘conventional’ insanity. Agaue believes she sees a lion on a branch and is carrying out the ritual of animal sacrifice expected of her in the worship of her god and not the horrific murder of a human. And so, the *Bacchae* elevates the irrational nature of divine madness to extremes as placing such behaviour firmly beyond the range of human control, the god Dionysos gives Agaue extra power in order to be strong enough to tear Pentheus to pieces (*Bacch.* 1128).

There is certain straightforwardness about the madness of both Heracles and Agaue; but Medea’s murderous act is more confusing, morally ambiguous and

²⁵ (Hartigan, 1987, p.131).

difficult to place. Medea was not suffering from madness instigated by divine intervention when she killed her children.²⁶ She seems to have been more conventionally insane, inflamed, outraged and psychologically destabilised by the breakdown of her relationship with Jason. It is here that the madness of Medea is found, deeply embedded in the nature of the human self. Euripides in *Medea* takes the audience away from external divine influence and finds cause in the passions — in itself resembling Plato’s highest classification of “the madness of the lover” (*Phdr.* 265.b), yet firmly placed within the conventional territory of ordinary madness. This ambiguity is not surprising as Medea’s madness is deeply internalised. Medea does not confront an external force of evil but instead an evil that lies within herself — though no less terrifying or mysterious for that for it lies within the human condition.

As such, Euripides presents a dark and unsettling threat that easily reaches fears and insecurities an individual might have about their grip on their own sanity or the security of their society.²⁷ Instead of the influence of a third party such as an evil demon,²⁸ Medea faces her own *thumos*. This two-fold self is at the heart of inner conflict — the moral standing and knowledge of one half, pitted against the will to

²⁶ However, there are many divine references in the *Medea* that should not be ignored. That Jason is punished for his perjury by the will of Zeus is considered by Kovacs to be part of a theme of “divine governance of the universe” (Kovacs, 1993, p.45).

²⁷ As Easterling says, a “civilised life is always most precariously poised, continually threatened from within” (Easterling, 2003, p.200).

²⁸ Such a vengeful demon is used especially by the tragedians to stand for a deity who avenges men’s evil deeds (particularly those that involve familial killing). Jason blames the gods for allowing Medea’s demon to fall upon him (*Med.* 1333). This vengeful demon followed Medea from her home in Colchis after she killed her brother. Jason’s complaint here gives the impression that as Medea has committed a kin killing once before he realises she can do so again, and he cannot be blamed for the situation she finds herself in (*Med.* 1329-50). See also Euripides’ *Electra* where Orestes asks if a destructive demon has “taken the god’s form” (*E. El.* 979), and in *Phoenician Women* where Antigone tells her father Oedipus about his “avenging spirit” — the curse on the family (*Phoen.* 1556).

act in conflict to the acknowledged moral right, of the other.²⁹ She is seized by the confusions of this inner conflict when she says, “Don’t, my soul, don’t do this!” (*Med.* 1056). For Medea the soul is the irrational seat of her passions, and her driving force to act. Her rational self can reason out plans to kill her children (*Med.* 1044, 1048) while at the same time realising it is morally wrong (*Med.* 1079).³⁰ The conflict is between ‘herself’ and her ‘*thumos*’ and as the Chorus point out she confronts her *thumos* as if she were its slave.³¹ But the *thumos* (interpreted here as “angry passion”) is immune from such appeals (*Med.* 1078-80). Medea knows her will to act and her soul drives her on notwithstanding the protest of her rational ‘moral self’.³² She knows she is not under the power of an external force but a force inside more powerful and controlling even than the very nature of her morally aware (and ‘better’) self.

Medea is not acting wrongly because she fails in insight but because the force of her irresistible *thumos* obstructs her better rational and morally aware ‘self’.

²⁹ In this respect Medea has neither male nor female tendencies, as some critics suggest. For example, Burnett sees Medea’s two-fold self as a psychological struggle between her “masculine, honor-oriented self and her feminine, hearth-oriented self” (Burnett, 1973, p.22) and Foley examines “Medea’s self-division in the context of the gender relations developed in the play as a whole” (Foley, 2003, p.244).

³⁰ “βουλευματα” at line 1044 where Medea talks rationally about her plans to take her children away (*Med.* 1045), and at lines 1031-5 where Medea talks about her future prospects with her children, could be in conflict with “βουλευμάτων” at line 1079 where her plans are of revenge by murdering her children and to which her *thumos* is not opposed. This supports the view that lines 1078-80 should be deleted because Medea’s *thumos* is the main source of her plans of revenge (Rickert, 1987, pp.101-2) and (Mossman, 2011, pp.329-30). Mossman doubts the validity of lines 1078-80 but because of their position in the play finds that deleting the lines altogether leaves Medea uncertain about killing her children (Mossman, 2011, pp.317-8).

³¹ (Dodds, 1951, p.186).

³² In Sartrean terms Medea acts in “bad faith” (Sartre, 1969, p.49). What she is in ‘herself’ involves her love for her children but when she chooses action she acts for herself to carry out her desire for revenge. This is not a secret self but an internal ambiguity that replaces the idea of some form of a conscious self controlling an unconscious one.

Any better moral intention is victim to this greater force of self, even though she understands the moral intention holds the rational key to right action. How is it possible that Medea can act wrongly when she believes she does not want to act wrongly (*Med.* 1056-64)? This seems incoherent because when there are two 'selves' involved the tendency is always to think the morally coherent one is the 'real' one (the 'true' self) and the 'bad' one is the other. An internal 'relationship' is not so straightforward or inclined to stick to simple rules. The craving for action, often passionate action, is sometimes too great for the self that 'knows better'. Medea talks metaphorically to her heart and practically to her hand. She tells her heart to be strong and prepare to take action and to her unhappier self (her hand) not to be a coward, not to remember she is a mother but to arm herself with a sword like a warrior (*Med.* 1241-50).³³ And so Medea acts irrationally when she kills her children. Indeed her inhumane action is the epitome of irrationality, and the antithesis of the strength of deductive abstract thought. With Medea the delicate positioning of Greek rationality in respect of emotive and morally striving human nature is characterised and exposed. The tragedy in *Medea* portrays the "victory of irrational impulse over reason in a noble but unstable human being".³⁴ If this other, irrational and impulsive self gains control over the will of the human being then the madness that ensues has a dark and frightening character, darkened even more as its revelation points to the moral blackness that lies within everyone.

³³ Taplin explains the dichotomy of Medea's personality when he says, "at the end of the play Medea is neither a man nor a woman as she triumphs over Jason" (Taplin, 2011).

³⁴ (Dodds, 1929, p.99).

3.3 Parental love

In the wake of these killings comes a high emotional cost involving the parents in a psychological ambivalence (recognised or not) where the act of murder is coupled with a love for the victims. The love a parent has for a child, in the parental context of protection and care, is subsumed by the parent's own (or an intervening 'divine') need for power or revenge over others. Medea's desire for revenge is more psychologically powerful than her will to love and care for her children.³⁵ Hera's need for revenge and her hatred of Heracles are more important than Heracles' love for his children. Likewise Dionysos' hatred for Pentheus is more important than the anguish of Pentheus' mother, Agaue who unknowingly kills her son in a Bacchic frenzy.

With parents driven by certain forms of madness to kill their own children it is difficult to judge the nature of parental love in the plays. Parental child murder in the plays, for whatever reason, and under whatever influence, is also recognised as involving 'love' for those that are killed. This love, perverted by some form of madness, divine or otherwise, adds a further layer of complexity to the understanding of why parents kill their children. The love parents experience for their children here may be affected by circumstances somehow suspended because of more powerful and divine influences such as Dionysos (*Bacch.* 1120-4) or Lyssa (*HF.* 859), or subsumed by overriding and uncontrollable emotions such as Medea's fear of being

³⁵ The psychology of child murderers and abusive parents in twentieth century Europe may shed light on the killing of children in Greek tragedy, at least the fact that it is often the parents who are the murderers (Easterling, 2003, pp.195-6). However, Corti suggests that infanticide in Greek tragedy "implies a concomitant theme of hostility towards children" (Corti, 1998, p.xvi). The dissonant connection between this form of hostility towards children and parental instinct to look after them might unsettle the normal accepted values of any society concerned with the importance and sanctity of family values.

laughed at by her enemies if she does nothing to change her situation (*Med.* 1049). The state of mind of the murdering parent therefore, has to be seen in context of how this love can be described and contextualised.

Parental love towards children is clearly part of a broader set of circumstances or influences. The ‘dramatic’ society expects parents to care for their children. Heracles reflects this when he says that the “whole human race loves its children” (*HF.* 636) and, in particular, that his children are his “beloved” (*HF.* 1147). This love extends to making provision for the children’s future. Heracles’ wife explains how her husband has already assigned land and wealth to his three sons in the event of his death (*HF.* 462-76), and she has already selected brides for their sons (*HF.* 476-80). The Chorus, in agreement with Heracles’ statement that he is experiencing concern for the lives of his family (*HF.* 579-82), says it is right that parents should care for their children, their own parents and their wives or husbands (*HF.* 583), and so it appears that everyone in Heracles’ extended family is loved. Megara refers to herself as a bird that keeps her children “nestling” under her wing (*HF.* 72), and the children’s grandfather Amphitryon offers his own life to save those of his grandsons (*HF.* 322-5).

Dramatically emphasising the importance of a loving family relationship in which the parents and grandfather take responsibility for the well being of the next generation heightens the sympathy for Heracles when unknowingly he destroys the family he loves. This is not just a responsibility for Heracles the hero; he is also a loving and tender father metaphorically describing himself as a ship that has “little boats in tow” (*HF.* 631-3).³⁶ And, indeed the children reciprocate that love. They are

³⁶ Heracles is also ‘towed’ along by Theseus at the end of the play (*HF.* 1424). Heracles is now the ‘child’ in need of help from a parent.

keen to know where he has gone, what he is doing and when he will come home (*HF*. 73-6). When he does return they rush towards him keen to take hold of his robes (*HF*. 521). This is a father who is loved and Heracles, in return, believes he is a loving (even though he has been absent) father. When he understands the danger his family faces, he realises the value and protection of his family are far more important than his labours (*HF*. 575), and that he must save those who depend upon him.³⁷ Indeed he realises that if he cannot save his family he will never be known as “gloriously-conquering Heracles” (*HF*. 582-3). His parental love exposes in him first the need to protect but then the necessity of being seen to protect, if his reputation is to remain intact. It is at this moment, when Heracles is at his most vulnerable, that Hera sends Lyssa to drive Heracles mad.

Although he does not realise he is killing his own children, Heracles does believe he is killing his enemy’s children. Like Megara (*HF*. 72), Heracles describes their children metaphorically as baby birds (*HF*. 982), indicating his awareness of their defenceless situation, but this does not stop him killing them. Clearly there is something amiss. That Heracles can kill innocent children (taking the Greek idea of hating your enemy (*HF*. 585-6) to extremes by harming his enemy’s children) does not tally with his later statement that he will not try to leave those he loves (*HF*. 628). His crime of filicide and the ability to believe he is killing his enemy’s children is therefore at odds with his own adopted role of fatherhood, his broader belief in the love of children and his sense of maintaining his reputation and proper social place.

It is the idea of protecting his own family that leads him readily to a crime that takes no account of the other, for how can he truly believe that killing another’s

³⁷ There is no sense of *hubris* here. His main concern is his family and he realises if his children and wife were prepared to die for him then he is prepared to die defending them (*HF*. 576-8).

children is any different than killing his own? It is as if there is some strategic difference in his mind — another's children are worth less than his own.³⁸ This can only be explained by the madness that overtakes Heracles when he unknowingly destroys his family. When he regains his sanity and realises his family is dead he knows his life is ruined, and with the knowledge that he has killed his beloved wife and children he believes his own life should be forfeit (*HF*. 1146-50). Amphytrion tells Heracles, he has “fought a war against your children that was no war” (*HF*. 1133). This message is brought home to him in the profoundest and cruellest of ways. Heracles, now sane once more, is left with the ultimate remorse, overpowered by a commitment to hate his enemy and save his own family he has destroyed them and in so doing destroyed everything he holds dear.

Agave also unknowingly butchers her dearest child (*Bacch*. 1298).³⁹ This ‘child’ is a young adult and the dramatic *pathos* does not have the same intensity that the young sons of Medea and Heracles, because of their youth, may have evoked. Unlike these young sons Pentheus is not an ‘innocent’ object to be used at the behest of a parent; he is a young man and a leader of his city. It is because of his irreverence to Dionysos that Pentheus becomes an ‘actor’ in his own fate. Nevertheless, he is still a child of Agave. It is this relationship that is ironically revealed because he is told by Dionysos that he will be brought back in his mother's arms (*Bacch*. 969), even though what will happen is that he is brought back in her arms as body pieces

³⁸ By killing the children of his enemy (Lycus), Heracles makes sure they cannot avenge their father's death by trying to kill him (*HF*. 168-9). Menelaus in *Andromache* also thinks along the same lines when he says, “For it is great stupidity to leave the enemy children of enemies, when one can kill them and remove fear from one's house” (*Andr*. 519-22).

³⁹ There are different types of ‘ignorance’. For example, an inverse relationship exists when Oedipus unknowingly kills his father though he knows he is killing another human being, whereas Agave thinks she is killing an animal. Ajax believes he is killing his enemies when in fact he is killing some sheep and cattle (*Aj*. 372-6).

(*Bacch.* 1284). Pentheus imagines being carried in his mother's arms like a small child (*Bacch.* 968). It is this child that pleads with his mother not to kill him. In an act of supplication Pentheus touches his mother's cheek and says, "look, it is I, mother, your child Pentheus, whom you bore in the house of Echion. Pity me, O mother, and do not through my errors kill your child" (*Bacch.* 1117-21). Although he is pleading for his life and therefore terrified, his appeal is based on a strong loving mother and son relationship.

After Pentheus is killed, Agaue grieves for the loss of her son's life with the anguish of a mother. She knows, as she returns to her senses and "altered from [her] previous mind" (*Bacch.* 1270), she is the one who has violently killed Pentheus and that it was the result of her irreverence to Dionysos when she denied that the god was the son of Zeus. In her grief and realising the head she is holding in her hands is that of her son, she asks Kadmos if the other body parts of her son have been put back together (*Bacch.* 1300). At this point there is a gap in the narrative flow.⁴⁰ It is possible this might have been Agaue's lament as she grieved over her son's body and the outcome, as Dionysos intended, her realisation she has destroyed her family. Unlike Heracles who is befriended in his misery by Theseus (*HF.* 1213-25), Agaue in her "misery" (*Bacch.* 1369) faces a lonely exile, desolate, and unaware of the difficulties ahead.

For Heracles and Agaue the love they have for their children is perverted by the remorse and grief brought on by murders not premeditated or accidental but by killings done under the influence of a god, or the intoxication of a worshipping frenzy in submission to one. Both Heracles and Agaue love their children and to

⁴⁰ (Seaford, 1996, p.249).

some extent the depth of their grief after they realise they have killed their children upholds the truth of that love. That Heracles and Agaue lost control of their minds and their ability to recognise the reality of their world has to act in their mitigation for it seems unreasonable to hold someone culpable of a crime they did not know they committed, even though it was their hand that committed the act.⁴¹

Medea planned to kill her sons and there is no apparent grief after she has killed her children. At the end of the play, she takes their bodies with her in the chariot (provided by her grandfather, the god Helios) to prevent Jason from touching his children and escapes any punishment, divine or human, for her crime (*Med.* 1378-83). This departure without any punishment has a propensity to portray Medea as divine and the filicide as needless.⁴² It is a deliberate brutal and violent act leaving the great hero Jason, humiliated and emotionally exhausted. In a final outrage Medea tells Jason she has killed the children because she wished to punish him (*Med.* 1398). Taking their bodies with her is part of that punishment. Such conduct makes it hard to accept that Medea, a mother, capable of filicide, really loved her “dearest” children (*Med.* 795, 1071) even though she tells Jason they are *her* “dearest” not his (*Med.* 1397).

At the beginning of the play when Medea curses her children (*Med.* 112-14) saying they should die with their father, it is an angry outburst of her suffering caused, as far as she believes, by the cruel hand of Jason’s treachery. At this stage she has no well-formed plan of revenge in place. Medea remembers she has gone through the pain of childbirth and knows too well the emotional and physical dangers

⁴¹ Because Heracles and Agaue did not know they had killed their children, the crime would have a different status in the minds of the audience.

⁴² (Rabinowitz, 1993, p.149).

of giving birth. From her comment that she would rather “stand in the battle-line three times than give birth once” (*Med.* 249-50, 1030) it is clear that she believes she is a ‘fighter’ making it more easy for her to defeat her enemies and cope with being a rejected woman left alone in a strange country with two small children.

This is the first time she has mentioned the children and it is obvious that their welfare is not her most important concern. Though the children feature in her thoughts her mental focus is still for herself and she is not objectively concerned, in the nurturing sense, for her children who are ably looked after by their nurse and tutor. It is only when Medea and her children face exile that she recognises, as if for the first time, that her children are young and helpless. Again this is not out of motherly concern, merely recognition that she can use their vulnerability to her own advantage. She cleverly uses this argument to appeal to Creon’s paternal side. Medea reminds Creon he is also a parent like herself (*Med.* 344).⁴³ As part of her plan to let them stay for one more day (*Med.* 340) she reminds Creon of the disastrous consequences for herself and her young children if they are exiled from Corinth (*Med.* 328).⁴⁴ Ironically this is something she did not think so disastrous when she exiled herself from her own country.

At this point, it is Jason who seems to show concern for his children offering to give money to Medea while they are in exile (*Med.* 461). Medea cannot believe he is worried about his children and rejects the money. Insulting him she calls Jason the “worst of all men” (*Med.* 465). Medea and Jason though both confessing concern for

⁴³ Creon says apart from his children his country means the most to him (*Med.* 329). Schlesinger believes this is the point when Medea realises how much children can mean to a man and first has the idea that killing her children will be the greatest punishment for Jason (Schlesinger, 1983, p.305).

⁴⁴ Megara, in *Heracles*, loves her children (*HF.* 280) and considers asking her enemy if her children can go into exile, but decides a “brave death” (*HF.* 307) is better than “miserable poverty” (*HF.* 304).

their children use them to score points off the other. If she is sent into exile Medea says she will be alone with her children, and this will not reflect well on Jason (*Med.* 513-15). Jason replies that his plan to marry Glauce ensures his children are brought up in a manner befitting their status as his sons (*Med.* 557-65), so protecting his house and name (*Med.* 597). His biting question for Medea is “what need have you of children?” (*Med.* 565) implying that she no longer has any need for children she already has, or any he might give her. The Chorus, not impressed by Jason’s words, believe Medea has been betrayed (*Med.* 576-7). Medea’s response confirms this. She says if Jason were not so evil he would have told her of his plan before acting it out (*Med.* 585-7). In this dialogue between Medea and Jason both place their children second to their own selfish needs and desires.

As part of her plan Medea pretends to show concern for her children by asking Jason if the children can stay with him and his new bride when she goes into exile. Medea knows already that she is not prepared to leave them in an unsympathetic place for her enemies to insult (*Med.* 782), and she senses her opportunity to carry out the murder of Jason’s bride (*Med.* 785-9). It is at this point that Medea says for the first time that she intends to kill her children as well (*Med.* 792).

The Chorus now take on the role of part of Medea’s inner conflict, introducing, by focusing on the future, the idea that the emotional force of the children’s helplessness in the face of their mother’s love will make it impossible for her to act. The Chorus supplicate Medea not to go through with the slaughter (*Med.* 855) disputing whether she is able to when she sees her children’s faces and suggesting Medea will weep when she sees them (*Med.* 861-2). The children trust their mother to protect them and do not know her future plans. The Chorus realising

the vulnerability of such unprotected children about to be used in a conflict of heightened tension say that when the children fall to their knees and supplicate their mother not to kill them (*Med.* 863), Medea will be unable to go through with her plan.

But already there is a greater drive at work within Medea's conflicted psychology. She is not deterred by the words of the Chorus and continues with her plan. Medea asks Jason to appeal to Creon for the children to be allowed to stay in Corinth and she will go into exile (*Med.* 939-40). She sends the children to supplicate Creon's daughter relying on the same innocent appeal the Chorus projected might save them from her — their youthful naivety — to persuade the princess to let them stay. Her plan also demands the death of the princess and so Medea gives the children poisonous gifts to take to Jason's new bride (*Med.* 969-75). Medea does not realise until too late that if the gifts kill Jason's bride then her children are accessories to a murder and because they are implicated they could be killed by her enemies and not by her.

Medea is sobered by this and becomes more concerned with what could happen to her children (*Med.* 1029-39). She almost falters in her resolve as a bout of selfishness makes her realise that, if she kills her children, they will not be able to care for her in old age or bury her when she dies (*Med.* 1032-5). At this moment Medea briefly rejects her original plans. Even though she realises the cruelty of what she might do she is already forecasting it as reality when she sees the children's "bright faces" and asks them why they are looking at her and smiling their "very last smile" (*Med.* 1041-5). Her heart almost fails her but her internal battle is decided — her injured pride and the need to punish her enemies are more important than the

welfare of her children (*Med.* 1049-55, 1059-60) or any appeals that they may have to her love for them as a parent.

Medea speaks directly to her children explaining to them how they will be all right when she is in exile even though she will not be with them (*Med.* 1021-3). They do not speak to her and their presence on stage, where they are safe and can be seen, is only broken when they move inside, out of sight, into the place where they are killed. This scene has particular importance for the tragedy. On the face of it, without Medea's declaration to her children of her concern for their welfare (*Med.* 1021-7), and her sudden emotional reversal of intention to kill them to the Chorus (*Med.* 1043-5), Medea would appear to the audience simply as a cold-hearted murderer who had no conscience. However, her expression of conscience is neither credible nor coherent. It is hard to believe her proclamation of love, tenderness and concern for her children's future safety when her intention to kill them is known.

The decision is made — punishing Jason is more important than her unhappiness at the thought of killing her children (*Med.* 791-6). Her irrational self tells her rational self not to be a coward or to weaken her resolve, and she believes it is necessary to murder her children (*Med.* 1062). In a farewell speech Medea tells her children about their future, knowing all the time they can have no future and their destiny is Hades (*Med.* 1068). She asks her children to give her their right hands to kiss (*Med.* 1070). She talks to them for the last time and describes their innocence, the way they look and even their breath is sweet (*Med.* 1075). Medea is convinced her children are better off dead and that they must die (*Med.* 1240). If she delays then her children will be taken from her (*Med.* 1237) and she will not be able to punish Jason.

Love, whether filial or based upon obligation and responsibility, does not go uncontested by the potential *thumos*. Madness from within can threaten the rational self, and in some cases where the passions have been sufficiently inflamed, can destructively overwhelm it.

3.4 The forces in opposition to parental love

If parental love is strong and consolidated, then any force that overturns it will be as strong or stronger. In the Euripidean tragedies of *Medea*, *Heracles* and the *Bacchae* there is an array of such forces in various combinations.

For Medea, the emotional forces of love, anger and jealousy, together with the binding commitment of oaths, are aroused from within as part of her powerful *thumos* and trigger the madness that ultimately drives her to take revenge on Jason, setting aside parental love for the cruellest act of revenge — the murder of her own children. The sacrifice (*Med.* 1054) of her children is the result of uncontrollable human revenge and internal conflict brought about by these emotional forces.

In the Prologue the Nurse describes how much Medea was in love with Jason, (*Med.* 8). Her desire for Jason, and her erotic passion — which the Chorus describes as “over-excessive” — will lead to destruction (*Med.* 627-8). So strong is this ‘love’ for Jason that she left her own country to follow him to Corinth and it is this passionate and wayward side of Medea that the Chorus fear (*Med.* 319). Medea believes she is bound to Jason because of previously made oaths. The Chorus reminds the audience of these oaths at the beginning of the play when Medea, in a melancholic state of misery, calls on these oaths and the gods to witness what has happened to her believing she will be dishonoured if Jason breaks these oaths (*Med.* 20-5). This was an important matter for fifth century BC Athenians where legal

matters had serious complications for inheritance and the standing of the family name.⁴⁵ Medea is likewise concerned for her children's inheritance and does not want them to be set aside if Jason has children with his new bride Glauce. The Chorus believe Zeus should be concerned about a woman whose husband has broken his oaths (*Med.* 148-58). Medea again calls upon her oaths by appealing to Themis, the goddess associated with divine justice and law, and Artemis, the goddess associated with childbirth.⁴⁶ Medea speaks of the binding oaths between her and Jason, which now seem to count for nothing, as he has married the princess Glauce (*Med.* 160-5). Medea, angry with Jason, calls him an "oath-breaker and deceiver of hosts" (*Med.* 1391). As far as Medea is concerned Jason is her husband, someone she once loved and depended on to protect her (*Med.* 227, 263). When she realises Jason has married someone else (*Med.* 378-82), a rejected Medea says she will defend her "marriage-bed" in blood (*Med.* 265-6).⁴⁷

Clearly, Medea has not been able to control the anger that has gathered strength from the beginning of the play (*Med.* 879). The Nurse tells the children to go inside because their mother is "enraged" and "will not lay aside her anger" (*Med.* 93-

⁴⁵ (Strauss, 1993, p.66).

⁴⁶ Medea's respect for the gods is seen at the end of the play when she says she will take the bodies of her children to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia and found a cult to atone for their murder (*Med.* 1378-83). This is a change of personality for Medea; from an angry and vengeful murderer of her two sons Medea seemingly moves into the realm of divine power (Mossman, 2011, pp.364-5). Her grandfather is Helios, the god of the sun. Medea also shared similar characteristics with the goddess Hera who represented wives that were subjected to their husbands' unfaithfulness. There is also a relationship with Hecate, the goddess associated with magic and witchcraft. At the beginning of the play Medea refers to the goddess as someone she has "chosen as a partner" (*Med.* 396). The fifth century BC audience were aware of the gods depicted in the tragedies (some of the associated rituals were practised publicly), but for some Athenians such behaviour could appear unacceptable and be "described as 'magic' or 'sorcery'" (Hall, 2010, pp.164-5).

⁴⁷ Medea's words of bloody revenge have masculine tones in that they are words of a warrior in battle who has been wronged (Foley, 2003, p.260). Medea's choice of a sword to kill her children is therefore characteristic of this 'male' nature.

4). Medea's anger with Jason reaches a high point when she realises the mistake she made leaving her own country and following the man she loved. Jason as a husband, and Creon as a king, both attempt male-based domination as they try to control what happens to Medea and her children.⁴⁸ This is further provocation for Medea, now made even angrier by the thought of being usurped from her "marriage-bed" (*Med.* 265) and sent into exile. Jason is prepared to accept her anger (*Med.* 447), little knowing that it will trigger her ultimate madness and the resultant murder of their children.

Medea is jealous of Jason's new bride because Glauce is young and a princess. Jason does not believe Medea should be jealous. He says he is marrying Glauce only to ensure that Medea and their children will be taken care of and not because he has tired of Medea (*Med.* 555), or desires Glauce more (*Med.* 593). For Jason such a common sense and practical arrangement seems possible but he soon realises that Medea's passions will make it impossible.⁴⁹ Medea feels betrayed in her "marriage bed" (*Med.* 265) and though wishing to, finds it difficult to reject the man who has taken mastery of her body (*Med.* 232-7). Added to this she also realises that because Jason is now married to Glauce her place as Jason's 'wife' is forfeit, and as an exiled person she has no home and no place in Corinth (*Med.* 511-14).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See Hall for the "distinction between provoked and unprovoked murder" in fifth century BC Athens (Hall, 2010, pp.191-2)

⁴⁹ His more rational approach is "motivated by homosocial drive for sons" (Rabinowitz, 1993, p.140). However, in his concern for his *genos*, Jason does not take into account the feelings his new bride might have for her new 'stepsons' (*Med.* 1147-9). Alcestis in Euripides' *Alcestis* speaks of her concern for her children if her husband marries again and his new wife is a spiteful stepmother to their children (*Alc.* 304-10).

⁵⁰ In her distress Medea uses the first person plural, trying to align herself to other women, when she talks about women being confined by marriage (*Med.* 240-9).

For Medea, her only recourse is revenge. She believes killing their children so that Jason can no longer count on them to continue his family name will destroy “the whole house of Jason” (*Med.* 794) — their sons, his new bride and the possibility of any future children he might have had with her. The greatest hurt Medea can inflict on Jason is not to kill him but let him live and experience the pain of knowing all the people who mean something to him are killed. At this point Medea believes she has nothing to lose and everything to gain — on the one hand she has no house, no husband, no country and fears being laughed at by her enemies (*Med.* 797-9), on the other she can claim a fulfilling revenge.

Medea is not a blameless pawn; she is culpable of her crime. Even though she was affected by such strong emotions as love, anger and jealousy, she carried out the murder of her children in full knowledge of what she was doing. It was a ‘crime of passion’ but a crime nevertheless. For someone who kills his or her children but does not know he or she is killing them the matter is strikingly different; Heracles does not carry the same responsibility for the murder of his children. He is a pawn of the gods, but still he commits murder, and he knew it but he did not believe the victims to be his own children. Physically it is his hand that does the deed, but it is the crushing pressure of the gods’ irresistible wishes and demands that drives him to madness and makes him kill his children in what is an outburst of passion. That he is mistaken about his victims’ identity, like Agaue, only adds to the tragedy and his resultant remorse, and does not take away from his culpability.

Agaue is another pawn of a god’s will, the force of which is stronger than her reason. Dionysos wanted to establish a cult following amongst humans and tensions surrounding this led to power struggles and eventual kin killing; Agaue is a victim of this. Her madness is derived from the senses. Agaue kills Pentheus “while

demonstrably deluded and insane”.⁵¹ Agaue and Pentheus have slandered Dionysos. Dionysos is displeased not just with Pentheus’ lack of respect (*Bacch.* 847, 857-61, 1297) but also Agaue’s disrespect for his mother Semele (*Bacch.* 25-30).⁵² Agaue kills Pentheus, therefore, as part of a divine plan of revenge in which Dionysos is the orchestrator of the sacrifice. The god prepares his vulnerable victim like a sacrifice by ritualistically touching Pentheus on his head, pretending to put his hair straight under his sash (*Bacch.* 932-3), touching Pentheus on his waist and on his feet, each time surreptitiously appealing to the young man’s vanity (*Bacch.* 935-45).⁵³ Dionysos is so sure of his power over Pentheus that as the young man leaves to go to the mountain he taunts him telling him how he is going to suffer in the hands of Agaue and her sisters (*Bacch.* 971-6). Pentheus is unaware of the god’s intentions because Dionysos’ words do not get through his naive excitement at the thought of his venture (*Bacch.* 913).

Although the ‘sacrifice’ is initiated by Dionysos, Agaue, like Heracles, unquestionably commits the murder even though she is unaware she has killed another human, let alone her son. It is no simple accident; her main crime is becoming intoxicated to the point of not being able to control what she does. Yet even this is not her responsibility because it is Dionysos who has caused her madness and brought about her delusion. In this case the tragedy is even greater because the act is compounded by the indignity of her believing she was slaughtering an animal. For Pentheus, the victim, it is the ultimate debasement of his life and the highest

⁵¹ (Hall, 2010, p.189).

⁵² Dionysos manipulates and encourages Agaue and the women of Thebes (the Maenads) into an elated condition of arousing release of inhibitions and an altered state of behaviour. This form of madness or mania meaning ‘frenzy’, ‘rage’, or ‘mad passion’ is associated with the word Maenad.

⁵³ The sacrifice is “performed in accordance with Dionysiac practice” (Girard, 2005, p.139-41).

tragic quality of his death. Agaue, like Heracles, has no murderous intention towards her children. The intention and ultimate responsibility lies with the gods using human agents to carry out their plans. Medea, however, is not ignorant of her crime. She knows exactly what she is doing and why.

3.5 The portrayal of the act of filicide — dramatic devices

In *Medea* the act of filicide is a clear, conscious and premeditated act of murdering children due to jealousy and anger directed towards a wayward husband (*Med.* 228-65). In *Heracles*, filicide occurs because the gods deceive the killer (*HF.* 829-32). In the *Bacchae*, a deluded killer carries out what she considers a rightful ritualistic act to propitiate a god (*Bacch.* 1114, 1125-46). In all cases any conventional ‘moral’ judgement (based on the natural idea of protecting children)⁵⁴ is clouded by other more pressing factors — passion, a hallucinatory spell and religious intoxication.

The development of the dramatic structure and theatrical conventions reinforces this terrifying impact, and the reasoning behind it is what compounds the monstrosity of the acts and accentuates the subordinate role of humans and their emotions to the power of the gods. Dramatic devices are initialised to their full to support the vulnerability of child victims.

The violent killing of “innocent children” is the most important emotional part of the *Medea*.⁵⁵ At the beginning of *Medea*, Medea’s young sons enter with their

⁵⁴ Even though it is unclear whether or not infanticide was common (i.e. in the form of exposure) in fifth century BC Athens, there is evidence to suggest parents wanted to protect the children they raised. Demosthenes records a terrible misfortune to have occurred to Parmeno (while in exile) when his wife and children were killed in an earthquake (*Dem. Against Apaturius*, 33.20). Thucydides also comments on the atrocities of the “bloodthirsty” barbaric Thracians who killed children which was a disaster too horrible to recount (*Thuc.* 7.29).

⁵⁵ (L. Golden, 1971, p.14). Page’s comment that the murder of the children in *Medea* is a “mere brutality: if it moves us at all, it does so towards incredulity and horror” takes into account his view

tutor fresh from exercise and obviously unaware of their mother's unhappy condition. They do not speak but their youth and liveliness is apparent (*Med.* 46-8). However, the Nurse introduces a sense of impending *pathos* when she talks about their potential suffering at the hands of their mother. This reaches a climax when Medea's two sons, left alone with their mother (*Med.* 1021), are apparently still on stage to hear their mother say that she will kill them (*Med.* 1063).⁵⁶ The two small children are frightened (*Med.* 1271-2) but speak to each other as they realise they are about to die. One child says, "dearest brother we are lost" (*Med.* 1274). They call to the Chorus to defend them as they run into the house (*Med.* 1277). The Chorus does or can do nothing to save the two boys from the woman who is now about to offend against the code of being true to her own sons.

The tragedy of their fate reaches its height when their cries are heard off stage as they are about to be killed (*Med.* 1270-8). Their voices are not heard again. The audience is left in no doubt about what has happened — Medea has killed her children. She will not let Jason have their bodies to bury, as he wishes (*Med.* 1377). Instead, and ensuring his punishment, Medea displays the bodies of their two young sons in her chariot (*Med.* 1317-22) keeping them tantalisingly out of his reach.⁵⁷ Jason is left, as Medea exits in a *dea ex machina*, knowing that his sons are dead, and his family and name destroyed forever.

that the killings does not solve the dilemma of a discarded wife only brings it to an end (Page, 1952, p.xiv). He does not account for any emotional feelings either of Medea towards her children or any human feelings towards the act of child murder.

⁵⁶ It is possible the children left the stage at line 1053 and were brought back by an attendant at line 1069 which means they did not hear their mother's intention to commit filicide (Dyson, 1987, p.30). However, it seems more dramatically poignant if the children are still on stage at this time.

⁵⁷ This denial is in violation of the Homeric code. Priam supplicates his enemy Achilles to let him have the body of his son Hector for burial, and Achilles agrees (*Il.* XXIV.476-523).

In *Heracles*, Amphytryon who is trying to look after his daughter-in-law and his grandchildren at the beginning of the play sets a scene of convincing familial affection. The three children are on stage sheltering with their mother and grandfather by an altar fearing for their lives. This first part of the play builds on the family theme and the need to protect the young children in the family unit. The children have only their mother and old grandfather to look after them (*HF*. 45-59). Their youth is recognised when their mother compares them to baby birds (*HF*. 72). When faced with being killed by Lycus, their grandfather asks what such young children can have done to deserve to die (*HF*. 206). Their youth and the stressful situation they are in is further emphasised when their mother dresses them in funeral clothes before they are about to be killed (*HF*. 332-5). The *pathos* increases still further when Heracles returns to see his children standing on stage dressed ready to die with funeral wreaths on their heads (*HF*. 526). Their youth and vulnerability is further stressed when the Chorus says, in respect of their own age, “youth is something I love” (*HF*. 639); but the children of Heracles will never reach this point from which to reflect.

There are three separate descriptions of Heracles killing his children as the concerned father is replaced by a menacing killer, as the darkening force of madness alters his state of mind. The Chorus sing Heracles is “hunting his children down. Not without effect will Madness run Bacchic riot through the house” (*HF*. 894-98). What follows immediately is the murder of the children, revealed distressingly by Amphytryon after he has failed to save them (*HF*. 899). Next a Messenger, in a lengthy report, describes the killings in gruesome detail (*HF*. 922-1015), and finally Amphytryon emotively tells Heracles how the children and Heracles’ wife were

killed (*HF*.1131-45).⁵⁸ The most detailed description of the killings and the weapons used is the Messenger's. First he reports how the children witness their father going through the rituals associated with a sacrificial offering. A sacrificial basket is passed around, everyone is silent and Heracles is about to put a lighted torch into the holy water when suddenly he is "no longer himself" (*HF*. 932).

What follows is a killing frenzy and the *pathos* is strengthened symbolically by reference to the links between Heracles and his sons that were made earlier in the play by Megara. While waiting to be killed by their enemy Lycus, Megara proudly recalls happier times and a picture of her children's childhood. She tells them how their father once gave their first son a lion-skin, the second a club and the third was promised Oechalia, a city that Heracles had taken using arrows (*HF*. 465-73).

Although the children do not speak on stage they are identified here as individuals and so their deaths are even more disturbing when the Messenger reports that Heracles uses a club and arrows to kill his children. Even more powerful are the reported words of one of Heracles' children pleading with his father not to kill him (*HF*. 988). The child knows he is about to be killed, but this time, instead of being killed by his enemy Lycus, it is by his own father.

Pentheus also is aware that his mother is about to kill him. His vulnerability is emphasised by the words that describe him and those that he uses to speak to his mother. Pentheus is a young man (*Bacch.* 974, 1174, 1185). He is on stage for a major part of the play but his most poignant words are spoken just before his mother kills him when he refers to himself as a "child" (*Bacch.* 1118, 1121). Agaue kills Pentheus, but it is not a formal sacrifice (e.g. where the victim's throat is cut like

⁵⁸ In the *Bacchae* it is also the task of a father, Kadmos, to tell his adult child Agaue that she has killed her own children.

Iphigenia, Polyxena, Macaria, or Menoeceus); instead this is a Bacchic hunt and the prepared sacrifice — the “wild animal” (*Bacch.* 1107) — must be dismembered. The killing of Pentheus is described as *sparagmos* (*Bacch.* 1135). His limbs are torn apart by his mother and the other Maenads (*Bacch.* 1125-45). Their hands are bloodied as they carry body parts around, and the horror is compounded when Pentheus’ mother triumphantly carries his head home (impaled on the end of a *thyrsos*), calling out to her father and son to witness what she has done. She does not realise she has killed her son and it is not a lion’s head that she is proudly carrying back from the mountain (*Bacch.* 1140).

Agaue joyfully takes her prize to her father and rebukes her absent son for not being a hunter like her (*Bacch.* 1252-5). The irony is all too bitter. Agaue is insistent that her family and friends see her symbol of success (*Bacch.* 1238-42), yet she is so blinded by madness that she cannot see what she has done. Her happiness lasts until her illusion is destroyed by Kadmos telling her to look closely at the face she is holding in her arms (*Bacch.* 1279). Kadmos, realising what has happened, carefully and slowly reveals to Agaue that she is holding the head of her son in her hands, not the head of a lion. Overwhelmed by grief and sadness for his daughter, Kadmos explains that with the death of Pentheus their house is in ruins — their family destroyed (*Bacch.* 1304, 1352). Kadmos’ grandson Dionysos has caused the sacrifice of his other grandson and he has to tell his daughter she has killed her only child.

Agaue is shocked into a partial amnesia by the news (*Bacch.* 1272).⁵⁹ She cannot remember where she has been and whether Pentheus was present. Slowly,

⁵⁹ (Devereux, 1970, p.42). This amnesia is similar to that of Heracles when he regained his sanity after killing his children (*HF.* 1094-1108)

with her father's help, she begins to regain her sanity and, as she realises what she has done, her happiness turns to misery.

3.6 Outcomes

To appreciate how these forces can generate the power necessary to overcome parental love it is necessary to understand the complex interlinking of the elements of revenge, a hallucinatory spell and religious intoxication, and how, when combined, they prove irresistible to the madness that is ultimately harnessed by their power. Child murder in Greek tragedy is never an act with a singular motive and the motives involved are never without issues in opposition not least, for example, wiping out the all important family line, for "it is mad to destroy your hope, your future".⁶⁰ The reasons for such actions tap into a range of factors each of which is part of the difficulty of penetrating the psychology of the human being. In these plays the underlying influence for child killing lies with divine agency, and the dramatic shock is based on the realisation that there are controlling forces so powerful that they can drive parents to commit an act grossly opposed to the natural instinct of parental love.

For Medea divine intervention happens at the end of the play when she 'escapes' in her chariot. In the case of Heracles and Agaue the power of the gods confuses right thinking completely (through the 'power' of hallucination or intoxication). If, as has been said, the Greeks accepted external stimuli of the senses as having divine origins and overpowering mental and physical power, then it is only a short step for these forces to become sufficient to control human behaviour. Both

⁶⁰ (Padel, 1995, p.208).

Heracles and Agaue, the human agents of the gods, unknowingly act out the revenge killings on behalf of the gods. As such, their madness is located externally; it is entirely driven and controlled by the gods. Even, as in the case of Medea, when the root of the influence is deep inside the mental self, the force of the opposing ‘inner self’ — the *thumos* — is sufficient to overpower the right thinking and morally cognisant subjective self. Such forces are sufficient to overpower the natural sense of parental love. Bringing fully into play the two conflicting aspects of the divided self, they force the individual beyond both the range of human comprehension and the reach of human morality. To this force humans are only victims. These victims are not immune from the results of their actions. The act of killing, because it is born of supernatural control, is not convincingly ‘right’ — the *bouleumata* recognises the ‘wrong’.

For Heracles and Agaue the outcome is deep remorse — hard felt, destructive and everlasting. In this case the audience is thrown back to the belief (deceived into believing) that love was indeed the dominating emotion suspended only long enough to enact a killing under the influence of a short-term and more powerful divine force. In the case of Medea the audience response is led another way. Such a “shift from sympathy to revulsion” can be seen as a mechanism used by Euripides to induce the audience to “experience a series of differing and sometimes incompatible viewpoints”.⁶¹ Feelings of compassion, by an audience, for Medea as an abandoned woman alone in a foreign country with her children at the beginning of the play, can change to feelings of horror when she kills her children and escapes without punishment, ‘god like’ in a chariot at the end of the play (*Med.* 1320). Medea does

⁶¹ (Mastronarde, 2010, p.68).

not even experience any remorse. Instead it is Jason who, unable to touch his sons, says how much he suffers from their deaths (*Med.* 1399-1400, 1402). Medea's mind has altered from loving Jason to hating him and being finally overtaken by such a strong desire to seek revenge that she becomes capable of killing her children.⁶² Yet there is another more disturbing aspect about the change in Medea. After the killings Medea, standing above Jason in a chariot, triumphs and gloats about what she has done when she says, "for I have got back at your heart as was necessary" (*Med.* 1360) and their deaths will "sting" him (*Med.* 1370).

She exits using a device normally reserved in the tragedies for the gods.⁶³ The use of a theatrical contrivance — the *dea ex machina* — shows Medea as her own divine agent. In exploring the problem of human subjectivity and divine agency Euripides presents a remorseless Medea capable of killing her children, only because she has become divine from within.⁶⁴ Like Hera in *Heracles* and Dionysos in the *Bacchae*, Medea has been able to exact her revenge by the killing of children because she has a degree of divine authority, and she will not (like Heracles and Agaue), incur pollution (as Jason believes (*Med.* 1371)) through kin killing. She is no longer a woman, more as Jason says a "lioness ... with a more savage nature than Tyrsenian Scylla" (*Med.* 1341). This, once the mother of two sons, now boasts inhumanely

⁶² As Padel comments, "Madness, passion, pollution, and disease are deeply bound to each other" (Padel, 1995, p.164).

⁶³ Euripides also uses the *deus ex machina* in *Stheneboia* when Bellerophon, at the end of the play, exits on the winged horse Pegasus, "acting half like a 'god from the machine'". If *Stheneboea* was performed around 429 BC (Collard, Cropp, Gibert, & Lee, 1995, p.82), then there is a similar pattern to the endings of Euripides' plays at this time. Sourvinou-Inwood suggests humans acting like a gods in this way (in Euripides' plays) did not continue after *Stheneboea*, leaving the *deus ex machina* for the sole use of the deities (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003, p.492)

⁶⁴ "Madness in tragedy is often the result (though not the only result) of the way divinity fights out its conflicts on the battle site of individual lives." (Padel, 1995, p.213).

about their deaths (*Med.* 1370) showing the dominating and irrational *thumos* has the power to overturn the human will or better inclination.

4 CHILDREN KILLING PARENTS

ἐπίοχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἶδεσαι, τέκνον,
μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἄμα
οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα.

Wait, my child! My son, have you no feelings?
This breast once nurtured you, cradled your sleep,
Your soft mouth sucked the milk that made you strong.¹

(Cho. 896-8)

4.1 Introduction

In the *Electra* plays of Sophocles and Euripides, and Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*, the expectation that children honour and respect their parents (exemplified by the Homeric Orestes who, as an act of filial faithfulness kills the man who murdered his father (*Od.* I.299-300)²), is turned on its head when Orestes and Electra kill Clytemnestra. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* when Oedipus unsuspectingly kills his father he is, unknowingly, responsible for destroying the integrity of his family. Using these extreme examples of murder and suffering, the tragedies

¹ Translated by P. Meineck (Meineck, 1998).

² "Or hast thou not heard what fame the goodly Orestes won among all mankind when he slew his father's murderer, the guileful Aegisthus, for that he slew his glorious father?" (*Od.* I.299-300). Translated by A.T. Murray (Murray, 1919).

highlight intergenerational conflict (i.e. children against their mother and a son unintentionally against his father) and the “de-authorization of the older generation”.³

The dramatic killing of parents by their own children portrays young adulthood in a way that conflicts in the most extreme sense with the established legislation concerning legitimacy and the position of Athenian young adults in the *oikos*. In the sixth century BC, Solon’s legislation on legitimacy, heirs and heiresses, and betrothal gave great importance to the conjugal family.⁴ In the fictional stories of Herodotus, Solon is reported to have told Croesus that Tellos is the happiest man alive because he is blessed with children and lived to see his children and his grandchildren (Hdt. I.32-5).⁵ This concept of vertical continuity between the generations, combined with an expectation that children would respect and obey their parents, is an important aspect of Athenian thinking a century later.⁶ The idea of a vertical family structure does not imply an exclusively ‘top-down’ hierarchy. Responsibilities were born by all family members with civil maturity, notwithstanding their position in the generational hierarchy.

³ (Reinhold, 1976, p.15). In Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* Menoeceus disobeys and deceives his father. Menoeceus thinks his father is an old man and pardons his father for making him look like a coward (*Phoen.* 991-8). Another example of the father and son conflict is the portrayal of Xerxes in Aeschylus’ *The Persians* as a reckless youth (*Per.* 744-5) who forgets the instructions of his father Darius (*Per.* 782).

⁴ Aeschines says in his speech *Against Timarchus*, “consider, fellow citizens, how much attention that ancient lawgiver, Solon, gave to morality, as did Draco and the other lawgivers of those days. First, you recall, they laid down laws to protect the morals of our children, and they expressly prescribed what were to be the habits of the freeborn boy, and how he was to be brought up”. (*In Tim.* 1.6-7)

⁵ Vertical continuity gives, as Lape argues, some conjugal family legitimacy because, unlike Homer’s heroes or Spartan men, an Athenian could not father an heir outside marriage (Lape, 2002, p.119). It is also significant here that Solon was giving a “moral grounding” to his reforms, dealing fairly with the *polis* and its citizens as well as ensuring that everyone only received what was their due (Owens, 2010, pp.117-19).

⁶ In the fifth century BC, those convicted of failing to observe Solon’s family laws lost their civic rights (Reinhold, 1976, p.25) and (Dodds, 1951, p.46).

Further, because there was no primogeniture all children remained important in the family unit, not just the first born. The stability of a vertical family structure with reciprocal responsibility provided a backcloth of both present and future certainty — essential in a world that was, and continued to be, subject to internal change and external forces. This fabric supported an understood and orderly situation where, for the most part children remained fixed in their subordinate role, but at civil maturity were given rights that altered the parent-child balance.⁷ The pressures of status, power and wealth would necessarily cause tensions and the difficulties of intergenerational strife and the ensuing problems and power struggles caused between fathers and their sons (to a greater or lesser degree) would be familiar to the audiences in the fifth century BC.

The vertical family structure in Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*, Euripides' *Electra*, Sophocles' *Electra* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* (similar to that found in the plays discussed in the 'Sacrificial Children' chapter) is primarily a downward configuration of parent or parents and their child or children. Vertical structures of the family unit such as that of Clytemnestra and Orestes or Jocasta and Oedipus reveal the propensity for conflict between mother and son. Such conflict disrupts the reciprocal responsibility model the Athenians considered necessary for the advancement of the family and the community. Although in the *Electra* plays and *Oedipus Tyrannus* there are only two generations involved, in the House of Atreus

⁷ An Athenian son was recognised as a citizen when he was formally registered in his father's *deme* in his eighteenth year (M. Golden, 1993, pp.4, 28). Golden suggests that because a boy could be enrolled between birthdays he could be seventeen or eighteen (M. Golden, 1979, p.36). If accepted, he would be able to defend himself in court, sign contracts and be part of the armed services (Strauss, 1993, p.95). However, although they could attend the Assembly, young men were not considered sufficiently intellectually mature to be elected to the Council (Garland, 2003, pp.200-1) and (Strauss, 1993, pp.62-6). Pericles promoted equality (Thuc. 2.37), which put fathers and their young adult sons on a similar political footing, and to some extent, an equal social standing. At its root, however, there is fundamental disparity (Strauss, 1993, p.8).

and the House of Thebes there is a strong sense of family history that reaches far back into the past in which others have committed similar acts of kin killing.⁸

Children killing parents is not a singular or simple dramatic theme; it ranges from the intentional and vengeful parent killing of Clytemnestra by her children Orestes and Electra, to Oedipus killing a man who unknown to him at the time is his father, Laius. These 'crimes' provoke different kinds of moral debate. For Orestes and Electra there is a legitimate obligation to avenge a father; for Oedipus there is a degree of blame/shame to be attracted to unknowing patricide. These events, in varying degrees and different ways produce for the children psychological states of remorse, separation from loved ones and guilt for their actions that can only be brought about by this type of murder. This dramatic portrayal of kin killing upsets the generally accepted state of vertical generational continuity. Filial obligations, such as looking after parents when they are old, taking over financial control if necessary and burying their parents when they die, can no longer be fulfilled.⁹ Power struggles within families lead to irrational behaviour and the vertical family structure being threatened or destroyed. The dramas analyse closely the intra-family relationships and bonds and expose the psychological merits and deficiencies of those involved. Also, the collapse of the vertical family structure can occur by

⁸ Greek mythology gives a number of accounts of kin killing in the House of Atreus and the House of Thebes. In the House of Atreus, Orestes' father Agamemnon killed his daughter; Orestes' grandfather Atreus killed his nephews and served them to his brother Thyestes to eat; and Orestes' great grandfather Pelops was killed by his father Tantalus and served to the Olympian gods to eat (Hard, 2008, pp.501-16). In the House of Thebes, Oedipus' father Laius abducted and raped Chrysippus the son of Pelops. Oedipus' great great grandfather Cadmus had four daughters: Ino committed suicide after her husband Athamas killed their son; Semele died of fright when Zeus visited her after giving birth to Dionysus (son of Zeus); Agave mistakenly killed her son Pentheus; and Autonoe's son was turned into a stag by Artemis and hunted by his own dogs (Hard, 2008, pp.294-335).

⁹ In Euripides' *Hecuba*, Polyxena, trying to reassure her mother that her brother Polydorus is alive, says, "he lives, and will close your eyes when you are dead" (*Hec.* 430).

misfortune or divine influence and the outcomes can be so shocking that it is impossible for those affected to regain mental stability. Outcomes bring only chaos and a perversion of the horizontal alliances associated with the family structure.

Horizontal alliances, such as hold between Electra and Orestes are a crucial part of the dramatic structure and it is through these that collaboration and resolve to act are born. Horizontal alliances show the frailties of human will that needs the added strength of another in order to act. Because they are vehicles for commitment they are also very strong and demonstrate the commitment that can be found between those who share a common cause. Horizontal alliances can be inter-familial, such as the apparent husband and wife relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta. This is ironic, however, due to the unknown actuality of it being a parent and child relationship (i.e. a vertical family structure). Other alliances reach beyond family relationships to include 'flatter' alliances with the older and wiser (e.g. the Old Slave in Sophocles' *Electra* has a 'parental' bond with Orestes and Electra). All horizontal alliances are relationships of dependency.

Matricide and patricide can be charted by an analysis of existing family relationships, the strength of the horizontal alliances and by certain significant turning points where the fortunes of the characters, their outlooks or conceptions change. Such turning points may occur as moments of recognition, release, relief or knowledge.

Aristotle defines *anagnorisis* (recognition) as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune" (*Poet.* 1452a.31-2). He claims that the best form of *anagnorisis* involves animate objects, occurs in complex plots, and includes a *peripeteia* (reversal), such as that in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*Poet.* 1452a.33-4). When decisions flow from

commitments made with others then dramatic turning points often steer the plot to sudden reversals of fortune. Such reversals are crucial to the dramatic structure as the changes they provide testimony of the protagonist's behaviour. Reversals hold an audience in suspense before they occur and provide relief, shock and disappointment when they do. A similar build-up occurs in the minds of the characters involved and this leads to extremes of emotion.

Reversals can occur at any point during a play and can involve various signs and clues. For example, Euripides' *Electra* is convinced, by the scar along his eyebrow, that the man standing in front of her is Orestes (*E. El.* 573-78); her previous belief that he was a stranger is overturned when she realises he is her brother. Aristotle gives alternative categories of recognition other than the one he considers the "finest" (*Poet.* 1452a.33). In a hierarchical order he ranks signs such as birthmarks, those acquired after birth such as scars, and external signs such as necklaces, as a less artistic method of recognition (*Poet.* 1454b.20-31). Aristotle also includes as methods of recognition: devices that have been added by the poet that are not necessarily required for the plot; recognition prompted by memory; and recognition through reasoning which, he considers, is second best to the best type. This best type, according to Aristotle is made "from the incidents themselves, when the great surprise comes about through a probable incident" (*Poet.* 1455a.18-19). The examples of this best kind of recognition kind that avoid arranged signs are from *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.¹⁰

Language, especially terms of endearment or association, can also provide

¹⁰ A reciprocal recognition occurs in *Oedipus Tyrannus* when Jocasta, listening to the words of the Messenger, realises Oedipus is her son and her husband (*OT.* 1020-72), and Oedipus realises Jocasta is his mother as well as his wife (*OT.* 1182-5). Aristotle considers the letter Iphigenia asks the Messenger to take to Argos is more than likely a conventional part of her plan (*IT.* 578-82). Both examples, therefore fit into Aristotle's best type of recognition arising from the plot.

pre-reversal tension as well as defining the turning point itself (e.g. when Aeschylus' Electra finally believes Orestes is alive she calls him the "best beloved darling of thy father's house" (*Cho.* 235)). Confused recognition is used as a way of mixing up the situation before a reversal occurs. Turning points can inject new resolve into the characters as they move to a greater level of knowledge or understanding, and redirect the action in pursuit of previously unforeseen directions (e.g. Sophocles' Electra believes she is holding an urn containing her dead brother's ashes and, therefore, cannot accept he is alive (*S. El.* 1210)). Sometimes hints of possible new knowledge are resisted as the turning point is slowly brought about. Turning points can be delicately woven into the action occurring through silent recognition or changes unrecognised by the main characters but obvious to all others.

So extreme are the acts of matricide and patricide that reasons for their occurrence need to be made fully credible. The contrast between certainty and confusion and between love and hate are methods of making the characters' emotional situation readily recognisable and easy to identify with. Such stark contrasts easily make the nuanced emotions of sadness, disappointment and humiliation. Such crimes, however, cannot go unpunished and destructive consequences are rightly wrought on those who would carry out such crimes. Such is the level of human hopelessness that these actions mean that divine assistance is the only chance for redemption. Ultimately, there is no consistency of justice as the convictions and justifications held by the murderers vie with the wrong of the act itself. Loss of family rights and remorse are the most overpowering punishments.

Various, often confusing, levels of involvement of the gods further complicate the moral dilemmas associated with these extreme killings. It is within this chaos that the distinction is found between the power of the gods and the

independence of thought that can be claimed by humans. Here a confused tension arises that highlights the beneficial (or otherwise) power of the gods.

4.2 Dramatic vertical family structures

In the tragedies, the reciprocal responsibility inherent in the vertical structure of the family unit can be altered. For example, the family unit of Electra and Orestes starts to disintegrate when Agamemnon sacrifices their sister, Iphigenia and continues when their mother, Clytemnestra kills their father.¹¹ After Agamemnon's murder Aeschylus' Clytemnestra sends the young Orestes away and out of sight to her ally Strophius of Phocis (*Ag.* 880-5). Making sure her daughter would present no future problems, Euripides' Clytemnestra marries Electra (a royal princess) to a peasant (*E.* *El.* 27-31). Such examples of a mother's intervention in the lives of her children are at odds with the traditional expectations and assumptions of Athenian women at this time.¹²

Yet in *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra, a character that crosses both political and gender boundaries, described by the Watchman as a "man in strength of purpose" (*Ag.* 9), believes she is a caring mother looking after the vertical structure of her family. The sacrifice and the resulting pain of losing her daughter Iphigenia is the

¹¹ The plots concerning intergenerational conflict in the House of Atreus would have been known, to some extent, by the audience when the tragedians presented their versions at the drama festivals (Burian, 1997, p.184). Aeschylus, the first playwright to present Clytemnestra as the sole killer of Agamemnon, in the *Oresteia*, performed in 458 BC, modified the myth from the stories of Homer, Proclus and other lyric poets. In Homer's *Odyssey* Agamemnon's murder is mentioned three times. In Book 1 line 300 and Book III lines 245-50, the murderer is the traitor Aegisthus, and Clytemnestra is a woman who has been seduced by Aegisthus. In Book XI lines 410-20, it is both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra who are guilty, each having strong reasons and, as lovers, a joint desire to eliminate the man who stands in their way.

¹² Athenian women were less active than Athenian men in making decisions concerning their children's future. Athenian women were not publicly named (Hall, 2010, p.131) nor, as Pericles believes, were their attributes to be talked about (Thuc. 2.46).

first and the most powerful justification Clytemnestra offers for killing Agamemnon (*Ag.* 1417). Loss of power, being usurped, or losing privilege, or preferential civil benefits when Agamemnon returns, although all compelling reasons to act with passion, do not rank with the drive motivated by a desire to defend, protect or revenge her child.¹³

It is this aspect of Clytemnestra that heightens the impact of matricide because in all three tragedies Clytemnestra appears to care for her children (to varying degrees) and the vertical family structure of parent and child, albeit tenuous, is still in place. Even though, ironically, Clytemnestra blames the curse of the House of Atreus for the (supposed) death of Orestes and pretends to mourn his loss (*Cho.* 691-99), she is the only parent that Electra and Orestes have still alive. It is therefore, on the face of it, irrational that Electra and Orestes would want to kill the only parent they have left.¹⁴ Electra and Orestes have no love for their mother and are determined to avenge the murder of their father. They kill Clytemnestra and in so doing eradicate what is left of their vertical family structure. The hatred Electra and Orestes experience for their mother outweighs any desires to keep their family together.

¹³ Clytemnestra says in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* "is there anything for which I ought to be more earnest than my daughter?" (*IA.* 902-3). In other Greek tragedies, Alcestis on her deathbed defends her children by asking if they could have a good stepmother who would look after them after she died (*Alc.* 309); Andromache tries to protect the child, fathered by Neoptolemus, from being killed by Menelaus (*Andr.* 501-36); and Hecuba blinds the man who killed her son Polydorus (*Hec.* 1035). These women linked by the experience of childbirth and the resultant tie between mother and child find themselves fixed in a psychological association and its consequent tensions. Megara in *Heracles* says, "I love my children. How should I not love those I brought into the world and suffered the agony of birth for" (*HF.* 280-2).

¹⁴ Orestes only 'knew' his father when he was a baby and could not have remembered him, and Electra would have only known her father when she was a young child. Feelings for their father is not, therefore, a love developed over years, but more one built on consequence of an accepted vertical family structure and allegiance to the head of the household. This is not the same love Euripides describes in *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Iphigenia (Agamemnon's first born child) loves her father who, she says, lovingly sat her on his knees (*IA.* 1220-2).

Although, the motherly bond is not so significant in either Euripides or Sophocles' *Electra*, it is still present.¹⁵ As Clytemnestra says poignantly, "it is a strange thing to bear a child, for even when they treat you badly, you cannot hate your own children" (S. *El.* 770-1). This is in contrast to Electra's feeling that she has a "mother who is no mother" (S. *El.* 1154) and believes she is treated badly. As young adults Orestes and Electra experience only hatred for a mother who took a lover while their father was away and who, they believe, no longer loves them. Sophocles' Electra sees her mother as a tyrant (S. *El.* 597) who, with her lover, abuses her daughter physically and mentally (S. *El.* 255-302, 599-601). Euripides' Electra thinks her mother a cruel (E. *El.* 418) woman who will give her nothing and Aeschylus' Electra believes her mother cruel and shameless (*Cho.* 429).

There is a type of breakdown of the vertical unity based upon the inherent tensions. This is confirmed when other agents become responsible for the welfare of Orestes. It is the old tutor in Euripides' *Electra* who sends Orestes to safety out of reach from Clytemnestra's lover (E. *El.* 16), and it is Electra in Sophocles' *Electra* who, in order to save her brother from their violent mother, gives him to the Old Slave to take to Phocis (S. *El.* 11-13, 296-7, 602). Orestes and Electra have no respect or love for the mother who went through the pain of childbirth (*Ag.* 1391-2, S. *El.* 533) and who once suckled Orestes at her breast (*Cho.* 896-8). Clytemnestra begs her children not to kill her (*Cho.* 896, E. *El.* 1165 and S. *El.* 1411), to let her grow old with her family (*Cho.* 908), and reminds Orestes she has no one else after the death of her husband (*Cho.* 920). Forgetting her lover, Aegisthus, Clytemnestra makes her appeal based only on her maternal association with her children,

¹⁵ Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* influenced the *Electra* plays of Euripides and Sophocles (March, 2001, pp.4-5).

regardless of the closeness of the relationship. This is the recourse that Clytemnestra makes when faced with death, but with her shallow words she loses all parental authority and is reduced to an enemy waiting to be destroyed.

In *Oedipus Tyrannus* there is an established, though falsely based, strong vertical family structure of father (Oedipus), mother (Jocasta) and their four children (the two sons are already men (*OT*. 1459) and the two daughters who appear on stage at the end of the play (*OT*. 1472)). There is also an apparent extended family. Oedipus believes his ‘father’ is Polybus and his ‘mother’ is Merope, who live in Corinth (*OT*. 774-5), even though they know, as does the Messenger and the Shepherd (and the audience), that he is not their son. This supposed vertical family structure is only threatened when Oedipus who, out of concern for his ‘parents’, leaves their home after finding out from the Oracle that he would murder the father who had produced him (*OT*. 794) and marry the mother who had given birth to him (*OT*. 791-3). In the same passage, fearful of the truth of the Oracle and blaming the gods for his misfortune, Oedipus refers to his adopted father Polybus by name and says he must never again see the man who reared him (*OT*. 827) for fear of being polluted (*OT*. 827-33, 1012).¹⁶ Unlike Orestes, Oedipus has no wish to be his father’s murderer (*OT*. 1001); indeed he exiled himself to make sure the Oracle’s prediction that he would commit this crime did not succeed.

As far as Oedipus is concerned Polybus is his ‘father’ and as long as he stays away from Polybus the vertical structure of his family is safe and intact. When the Messenger tells Oedipus that Polybus has died from old age and Oedipus is now

¹⁶ Sophocles’ use of “φυτεύσαντος” (*OT*. 794) and “ἐξέθρεψε” (*OT*. 827) hints at the truth of Oedipus’ father’s true identity. At line 794 it is the biological father (Laius) and at line 827, the father (Polybus) who had reared Oedipus.

King of Corinth (*OT*. 940) Oedipus naturally believes the Oracle's prediction is false. However, Oedipus is fated from birth, and his subsequent exposure and rescue, fulfils the prophecy (as revealed by Tiresias (*OT*. 447-62)). Yet instead of being a passive victim of his fate Oedipus takes an active part in discovering the truth about his past and family. He chooses to investigate Laius' murder (*OT*. 132-41), goes against his adoptive parents' wishes when he goes to Delphi to seek the Oracle (*OT*. 779-93), and ignores Jocasta's pleas to discover the truth about his birth (*OT*. 1064-5). Knowing that he had no part in Polybus' death (*OT*. 964-72), but fearing the Oracle's other prediction, that he will marry his mother, Oedipus continues to question the Messenger. In the short exchanges that follow the truth about Oedipus' 'parents' and how he was given to Polybus and Merope as a baby is revealed. Because of Oedipus' insistence and his determination to find out who his real parents are, the vertical structure of his adopted family unit (i.e. Polybus and Merope) collapses.

After the Messenger's revelations and with the knowledge that Laius and Jocasta are his parents Oedipus realises that he has killed his real father Laius (*OT*. 1182-5). To ensure his own survival Laius gave Oedipus as a baby to be abandoned on a mountain to die, believing the prophecy that his son would kill him (*OT*. 711-22). Laius believed he had broken the structure of his own downward vertical line but unknown to Laius, Oedipus survives and it is years later when Laius is confronted by a 'stranger' and killed, that the true relation of father and son is destroyed. When Oedipus finally understands he has killed his real father and married his mother, and that their children are his sisters and brothers he believes he is cursed (*OT*. 1184-5). His determination to seek the truth has left the vertical structure of his own family unit (i.e. himself, his wife Jocasta and their four children)

in chaos. It is replaced with a corrupted horizontal alliance with his own children, his half siblings. Only overwhelming pollution resulting from the crimes of patricide and incest can ensue. In the following chaos and his wife's (mother's) suicide, Oedipus' grief is so dreadful (*OT*. 1265) that he blinds himself in recognition of his own pollution — unwilling to see the world, which to him is now beyond repair.

4.3 Dramatic horizontal alliances

With the vertical family structure in chaos, the importance of horizontal alliances becomes a significant part of the dramatic structure for the advancement of the plots. In the *Electra* plays the development of the horizontal alliance between Orestes and Electra is crucial to their mutual aims, whereas in *Oedipus Tyrannus* it is Oedipus' progressive realisation that he is part of a horizontal alliance, which becomes the more significant feature.

Notwithstanding the fact that Orestes and Electra have been apart for several years, all three playwrights' rewrites of their story portray a strong relationship — the horizontal alliance — between brother and sister as being central to their act of matricide. This type of relationship, in these plays, has a greater bond even than the one normally existing between a child and its parent.¹⁷ Driven mainly by emotional, familial and physical reasons Sophocles' Antigone says, "my husband being dead, I could have another, and a child by another man if I had lost a child; but, as my

¹⁷ Relationships between brother and sister that went beyond the sibling connection, if not common, were known. Plutarch records an example of a close relationship between Elpinice and her half brother Cimon in Athenian society about 450 BC. It is possible they lived together as man and wife (Plut. *Vit. Cim.* 4.14) as Greek law permitted the marriage between a brother and sister as long as they had different mothers. When Cimon was charged with treason Elpinice pleaded with Pericles to acquit her half brother (Plut. *Vit. Per.* 10.4-5) and when she died she was buried with her own birth family, not her new husband's family (Cox, 1988, p.381). In Aristophanes' *The Clouds* there is a reference to a lost play of Euripides called *Aeolus* in which Macareus and his full sister Canace were living as man and wife (*Nub.* 1372-4). See also (Sommerstein, 2002, p.222).

mother and father are hidden in the house of Hades, no brother could ever be born again” (*Ant.* 909-12). As Orestes and Electra’s father is dead and they intend to kill their mother, there is no chance they will ever have any more brothers or sisters.

They have a sister, but only Sophocles includes Chrysothemis as a character in his play. In the case of Electra and Chrysothemis the same rules of close kinship with a common understanding and mutual aims do not apply even though they are sisters. Unlike Electra, Chrysothemis does not experience the same degree of hatred for their mother (*S. El.* 372), and refuses to help Electra achieve her plan to commit matricide (*S. El.* 332-40). Chrysothemis cautions Electra telling her that she is a “woman, not a man, and not as strong as our enemies” (*S. El.* 999-1000). Consequently the relationship between the determined Electra and her weaker but more practical and sensible sister Chrysothemis (*S. El.* 378-84) is not as strong as the bond between Electra and Orestes (*S. El.* 1232-5). Instead of a bonding strong horizontal alliance sustaining the motivation to avenge their dead father (*S. El.* 399-400), it is the lack of motivation and non-existent mutually held wish to kill their mother that cause this horizontal alliance of sisters to be so weak that it fails to produce or sustain action.

All three plays dealing with Electra and Orestes recognise the force of the bond between the two siblings. The decision to kill their mother that both Orestes and Electra have each individually nurtured, can only be carried out together. Electra does not have the physical strength (Euripides’ Electra acknowledges the male ‘stranger’ (Orestes) is stronger than her (*E. El.* 227)), or the psychological strength to kill her mother by herself (Aeschylus’ Electra wants to remain “in heart more chaste” and “in hand more innocent” than her mother (*Cho.* 140-1)). It is only with the support of Orestes that Electra can achieve her goal. Yet, when Euripides’ Orestes

asks Electra if she would “really endure, with him” to kill Clytemnestra her reply is “yes, with the very axe which killed our father!” (E. *El.* 278-9). Such is the depth of hatred she has for her mother that when she joins forces with Orestes the horizontal alliance between them, which is a prerequisite for the killing of Clytemnestra and consequently the destruction of the vertical family structure, is intensified. Orestes and Electra acting alone do not have the same power as when they combine their mutual aspirations (S. *El.* 1284-1301, *Cho.* 421, E. *El.* 582).

Some horizontal alliances may not be as intense as those between siblings determined on a course of action. However, these ‘flatter’, but still significant alliances display a bond of closeness and enable or produce a particular strategic outcome. In *The Libation Bearers* there is a significant example of a horizontal alliance. Orestes has travelled from exile in Phocis with Pylades his friend and collaborator. Pylades has only Orestes’ interests at heart and is present when Orestes kills Clytemnestra. As this is about to happen Orestes turns to Pylades for support. Pylades counsels his friend about the need to follow the instructions of the Oracle of Apollo and the moment of hesitation for Orestes passes.

There are other types of alliances that have importance for the development of the tragic plot. For example, the Nurse in *The Libation Bearers* loyally fills the position, in a surrogate vertical family structure, as a ‘mother figure’. She has looked after Orestes since he was born and mourns deeply when she hears about his death (*Cho.* 730). She believes an uncaring Clytemnestra is relieved to hear about her son’s death (*Cho.* 737-40) even though Clytemnestra has previously expressed grief (*Cho.* 691-9). For the Nurse this show of maternal grief is misplaced and insincere.¹⁸

¹⁸ The idea that Clytemnestra does not show grief when she hears about Orestes’ death because it would be inappropriate for someone in her position has merit (Margon, 1983, pp.296-7). If

Although the Nurse has no direct contact with Orestes she plays an important role to show the contrast between her own caring attitudes towards him in contrast to his mother's. It is this concern for Orestes that is the reason for the Nurse, at the request of the Chorus, to tell Aegisthus to arrive without his guards (*Cho.* 766-73). This deception gives Orestes the opportunity to murder Aegisthus (*Cho.* 869).

Other surrogate parental alliances also extend the relationships beyond the kinship that supports Electra and Orestes' matricide. At the beginning of Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes calls the Old Slave his "dearest of servants" (*S. El.* 24) and the Old Slave calls Orestes his son (*S. El.* 79). Here, the Old Slave acts as a 'father figure' directing Orestes and Pylades, who is Orestes' "dearest of friends" (*S. El.* 15, *E. El.* 82-3) not to hesitate any longer but to seize the moment and decide exactly how Orestes should kill his mother. The Old Slave is integral to the plan, when unrecognized by Clytemnestra and Electra he gives them the news of Orestes' false death (*S. El.* 673). Later, having a type of 'parental' authority over Orestes and Electra he tells them that he has been watching at the doors of Clytemnestra's palace and insists they must be quiet in case someone hears them (*S. El.* 1326-39). More importantly he urges them not to delay and that it is now time to act (*S. El.* 1326-39). Electra calls the Old Slave her father (*S. El.* 1361). Even though he is a slave he appears as a surrogate replacement for Agamemnon acting as an older male that the young Electra can rely upon. The relationship cannot be termed as a true vertical family structure yet it is a 'flatter' alliance in which the older, and perhaps wiser, person organizes and helps the young adults with their plans.

Clytemnestra had no feelings for Orestes the *pathos* when she pleads with him not to kill her would not have the same impact.

There are similar extended 'paternal' relationships in Euripides' *Electra* where an older man acts benevolently. At the start of the play it is revealed that Aegisthus has given Electra to the Peasant as a wife. The Peasant, aware of his status, is kind to Electra and shows a fatherly concern for the virgin royal princess whose family circumstances have changed, and who now looks like and acts like a slave (E. *El.* 77-81). The relationship between them gives Electra opportunity to bemoan her fate to a man (and the audience). She calls the Peasant her "dearest one" (E. *El.* 345) denoting that he is more than just a friend. Another older man who Electra depends on is asked by the Peasant to bring food and drink for the strangers (E. *El.* 408-14). The man is Electra's old tutor and he refers to her as his daughter (E. *El.* 493). He is devoted to her and her father, and is keen to help her identify the signs at Agamemnon's tomb which he believes are signs that prove Orestes has returned (E. *El.* 515-22, 532-3, 538-40). Once the two siblings have been reunited the Old Man is the person who tells them to kill Aegisthus and their mother (E. *El.* 613) and makes sure they are successful by saying where they can find Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. The Old Man's only concern is for his "dearest children" (E. *El.* 679) and that when they are reunited they can avenge their father's murder.

Oedipus has no friends or old men to support him in a horizontal alliance relationship.¹⁹ In the only horizontal alliance that means anything to him Oedipus still calls the two girls, who are now his sisters, his "dearest" (*OT.* 1474) children. They come on stage at line 1470 and although they do not speak they move, at Oedipus' request, to hold his hands (*OT.* 1480-2). It is only at this point that he tells

¹⁹ Oedipus' relationship with the Elders of Thebes (the Chorus) has broken down. The Chorus, once grateful to the man who saved the city (*OT.* 40-57) try to calm the situation between Oedipus and Creon (*OT.* 631-3). Although the Chorus is sad when it realises what has happened to Oedipus (*OT.* 1297-1306) the Chorus wished it had never known him (*OT.* 1347-8), and that the Shepherd had left Oedipus to die instead of saving him (*OT.* 1356).

his children that he became their father “by her from whom he himself was got” (*OT*. 1482-3). He is concerned others will taunt them and that they will never get married (*OT*. 1486-1502). This scene portrays the depth of suffering Oedipus is feeling not just for himself but also for his children. He asks Creon (Jocasta’s brother) to take pity on them, to be their ‘father’ and look after them hoping that they will have a better life than the “father who begot you” (*OT*. 1514). He knows that they are of his blood and therefore as polluted as him.

4.4 Dramatic turning points

The point at which two individuals recognise each other, or each other’s desires, or when an individual is forced to recognise the truth about himself or herself or his or her circumstances, provides a poignant turning point to the development of the tragedy. Such points show both the characters and the audience how a sudden reversal of fortune can be brought about when some long hidden truth or knowledge is revealed and so recognised. The organization and placing of these turning points forms a crucial part of the dramatic structure. In the case of *Electra* emphasizing and strengthening the nature of the horizontal alliance, in the case of *Oedipus* bringing to full light the collapse of the vertical family structure.

For *Electra* the turning point is the actual recognition of another person — the moment when she recognises her brother.²⁰ This occurs for Aeschylus’ *Electra* early in the play (*Cho*. 232) and is quickly made; for Euripides’ *Electra* it happens just under half way through the play (*E. El*. 577); for Sophocles’ *Electra*, taking longer to develop than the other two, it occurs nearly at the end of the play (*S. El*. 1227). In all

²⁰ In the *Electra* plays *Electra*’s recognition of her brother leads to strengthening their alliance and their resolve to murder Clytemnestra.

cases the turning point happens “*before* the action reaches its principal crisis and denouement”²¹ — the killing of Clytemnestra and the subsequent repercussions for Orestes and Electra.

Brother and sister have not met since they were children. In *Iphigenia in Aulis* Orestes is referred to as a baby (*IA*. 623, 1248) who weeps and does not speak when he arrives in Aulis with his mother and sister Iphigenia. This makes him about one to two years old before his father leaves for Troy. Agamemnon is away for ten years and is killed by Clytemnestra on his return. Around this time Orestes is approximately twelve years old and Electra, in Sophocles’ *Electra*, is old enough to give instructions to the Old Slave to take Orestes to Phocis (*S. El.* 12-13, 296-7, 601). According to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Orestes kills Aegisthus eight years after Agamemnon was murdered (*Od.* III.303-6), making him approximately twenty years old in the *Electra* plays when the sister and brother, after being eight years apart, are reunited. There is little possibility they could easily recognise each other on sight. Electra’s recognition of her brother is aided in all three plays by signs and in the case of Euripides’ play with additional help from the Old Man (*E. El.* 514-22, 532-3, 538-40).

Aeschylus’ Orestes secretly watches his sister, in the dim light of early morning, as she attends their father’s tomb. Even though the light is faint, he recognises her because she is so conspicuous with her grieving — no one other than his sister could mourn so much for Agamemnon (*Cho.* 16). This is not a reciprocal recognition; before brother and sister are reunited there are signs at the tomb that make Electra think Orestes could be alive. She sees a lock of hair that looks like her

²¹ (Cave, 1990, p.225).

own (*Cho.* 178), but in short exchanges with her women is led to the conclusion that Orestes could have secretly sent the lock of hair (*Cho.* 180) and need not have been there in person. This line of reasoning fails when she sees footprints that appear to look like her own. The footprints do not convince Electra that they belong to Orestes and the sight of them and the suspicion that they bring only makes her more confused. Electra has already concluded Orestes is still in exile so he cannot have made the footprints.²² At this point her mind is in “torment”, her “brain is in a whirl” (*Cho.* 211). She agonises that the ‘man’ standing in front of her could be tricking her into believing he is Orestes (*Cho.* 220). It is only when she recognises the cloth he gives her as the one she once wove that Electra is forced to realise that her brother has returned home (*Cho.* 232). Orestes explains to Electra that having seen the lock of hair and footprints that are like hers she should believe, as Aristotle claims, “one like me is here; there is no one like me but Orestes; he, therefore, must be here” (*Poet.* 1455a.5-6).²³

At this turning point for Electra, after her dismay and fearful anticipation has turned into joyful recognition, she says, “O best beloved darling of thy father’s house” (*Cho.* 235). Although she is remembering the force of the vertical structure of her family, she realises it is destroyed and the horizontal alliance between her and Orestes is now more important and now firmly in place. The word “dearest” is used to describe the familial love Electra experiences for Orestes. In the vertical family

²² Lloyd-Jones’ article weighs Fraenkel’s opinion that including the footprints is “bad poetry”, and as Aeschylus did not write bad poetry then the footprints have been added later by someone else; and the opinion of Wilamowitz who believes the footprints are important because they could not have been sent by a messenger like the lock of hair (Lloyd-Jones, 1961, pp.175-7). On balance it seems reasonable to conclude that the footprints add to Electra’s progressive recognition of Orestes and without them the tension would not have built, either for Electra or the audience.

²³ Aristotle quotes Electra’s ‘reasoning’ as an example of his fourth type of recognition (*Poet.* 1455a.5-6).

structure of mother and daughter (before Orestes returned), Electra has known only “hate in the house” (*Cho.* 101-2), where she has been kept a slave (*Cho.* 135) by a mother who is “hated” (*Ag.* 1411, 1413) by the people as well as by her daughter who believes she “rightly hate[s]” (*Cho.* 241) her mother. This hatred felt passionately by Electra finds its place only when Orestes returns and she is reunited with the only person she loves.

Euripides also portrays the strength of this relationship between sister and brother. The turning point of recognition for Euripides’ Orestes happens at the beginning of the play. He may not have recognised the short haired ‘servant woman’ he sees approaching the cottage (*E. El.* 108), but while he waits secretly in hiding he overhears Electra talking about her father Agamemnon and her mother Clytemnestra (*E. El.* 115-16). With her words of concern for her exiled brother (*E. El.* 130-6), Orestes is in no doubt that the woman is his sister.

Euripides also uses the signs of the hair, footprints and the cloth as signs for Electra to recognise her brother. Electra contemptuously dismisses them as illogical. Here, Electra has a deeper sense of reasoning, based on whether the signs prove anything or not, than Aeschylus’ Electra. When her old tutor points to the golden hair on Agamemnon’s tomb as possibly belonging to her brother, Electra says it is impossible as her brother would not secretly return, and many people had hair the same colour as that found on the tomb (*E. El.* 524-31). Regarding the footprints Electra pragmatically remarks that male footprints cannot match a female and, in any case, the impression cannot be conclusive when it is made on “rock-hard ground” (*E. El.* 534-5). The cloth is also dismissed. Electra questions whether, as a child, she would have been able to weave the cloth and whether the grown up Orestes would

still have the same cloth (E. *El.* 541-3).²⁴ Here, Electra is dismissing not only the signs but also her old tutor's attempt to persuade her the signs have some significance.²⁵ Admittedly she has already told the 'stranger' (Orestes) that she would not know her brother if she "set eyes on him" (E. *El.* 283) so it would be hard for her to accept the signs were connected to Orestes. The tension of whether the recognition will take place is relieved, however, when Euripides introduces an indisputable sign — a scar. Although Electra has a moment's hesitation (E. *El.* 575), this sign, nevertheless, confirms Orestes' identity, and Electra is finally convinced (E. *El.* 577-8).²⁶

The details of the plot that build up to the turning point include the careful use of terms of endearment.²⁷ Like Aeschylus, Euripides also uses the word "dearest" to describe the closeness that exists between Electra and the members of her family she loves and believes she has lost. When Electra sings her monody — lamenting the loss of her father and brother — she uses the word to describe both her father Agamemnon (E. *El.* 153) and her brother (E. *El.* 229). Later the Old Man asks Electra to look at her "dearest" (E. *El.* 567) and repeats the word at line 576 to insist that the man standing in front of her is indeed Orestes. Electra asks if it is "truly" her brother (E. *El.* 581) and holding him close hardly dare believe he is alive. At the turning point for Electra — the moment she realises her brother is alive —

²⁴ The last part of this reasoning is ambiguous and not so convincing. Whether Electra meant Orestes could not still be wearing an item of clothing made for him when he was a child or whether he just kept the item out of sentimentality is left open. (Cropp, 1988, pp.139-40).

²⁵ See Gallagher for discussion of different interpretations of the signs (Gallagher, 2003, pp.401-15).

²⁶ In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is first recognised by Eurycleia (his old nurse) because she sees a scar on his knee (while washing him) which he had received from fighting a boar (*Od.* XIX.390-5). Odysseus later uses this sign to prove his identity to his father (*Od.* XXIV.330-3).

²⁷ Aristotle claims that complex plots with detail build up to the best "form of Tragedy" (*Poet.* 1452b.30-1).

remembrance of the hurt she suffered at the hands of a “cruel-minded mother” (E. *El.* 27) who abused her daughter, is replaced by the promise of future happiness with Orestes. Electra is more emotional than Orestes who, agreeing that he is the only person to help her and that they are now together turns to planning how they can kill their mother (E. *El.* 582-4).

Sophocles also uses a recognition scene between Orestes and Electra to portray the strength of the horizontal alliance. The moment is built up slowly. Orestes recognises his sister’s voice at line 80 when he hears her crying but is hurried away by the Old Slave who thinks she is a servant girl. However, when Orestes, carrying the urn containing his pretend ashes, meets Electra at line 1105 he does not appear to recognise Electra immediately. He only realises that the girl in front of him is his sister when he sees her lamenting sorrowfully over the urn (S. *El.* 1127-71). At this turning point the Chorus mentions Electra by name and Orestes, realising that Electra is standing in front of him mourning his death, believes he can no longer “control [his] tongue” (S. *El.* 1175). The moment for pretending he is dead is over and Orestes gently comforts his sister. Electra still has no knowledge that the stranger in front of her is her brother, and continues to hold onto the urn.²⁸ Up to this point the build up to the recognition has arisen naturally from the dialogue between Electra and Orestes. It is only at the end of the scene, with the direct proof of the ring that the turning point occurs; only when Electra finally recognises Orestes does her grief change to joy.²⁹

²⁸ Electra believes that the person in front of her is a stranger (S. *El.* 1180, 1206) and cannot believe it is Orestes until line 1223. Clytemnestra also believes Orestes became a stranger (S. *El.* 777) to her when he went into exile

²⁹ “As a play of recognition and reversal the *Electra* is second only to the *Oedipus Rex* in Sophocles’ work” (Segal, 1966, p.481).

Like Aeschylus and Euripides, Sophocles uses similar words to describe the turning point. This is Electra's "happiest day" (S. *El.* 1224) and Orestes replies in agreement using the same word. Electra repeats this phrase at line 1354 when she recognises the Old Slave who took Orestes to Phocis at her request. By repeating this phrase again Electra's joy for Orestes' return is reinforced, and the horizontal alliance, for her, is put in place. The word "dearest" is used by Electra to describe Orestes (S. *El.* 1158, 1273, 1286, 1357, 1449)³⁰ and her father, (S. *El.* 462, 1233). It is used also by the women who have become her closest confidants (S. *El.* 1227, 1398) and by Chrysothemis to describe Electra (S. *El.* 871) and their brother (S. *El.* 903).³¹ Electra, knowing it is Orestes who is her dearest of all, realises just how close he is to her when she says, "whatever pleases you shall be my pleasure also" (S. *El.* 1301-3). When Electra thinks her brother is dead and she is holding the urn with his supposed ashes she describes how Orestes, when she last saw him, was dearer to her than he was to his mother (S. *El.* 1146). She believes Clytemnestra has never been a 'mother' to her children. Electra experiences only "hatred" (S. *El.* 1311) for her mother, and says if Chrysothemis could find the strength she would also experience the same "hatred" (S. *El.* 348).

Unlike Electra and Orestes whose turning point gives them both a sense of purpose and strength they did not have when apart, for Oedipus it is the recognition

³⁰ There are more *philia* words used by Electra towards her brother than are used in return (Blundell, 1991, p.174, fn.93). This could portray Orestes as not having the same fondness for his sister as she does for him. However, it is also the case that Orestes is more concerned for their safety when he urges Electra to curb her joy and be silent so their enemies cannot hear them (S. *El.* 1239, 1259).

³¹ In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, there are only three instances of the word "dearest". Each evokes a different emotional quality: lovingness; pity; and shame. The word is used by Oedipus to describe a conventional loving relationship with his wife Jocasta at line 950, before he knows the truth about his family. It is used to accentuate his pitiful state when he describes his daughters who he now realises are his sisters at line 1474, and it is used when Tiresias warns Oedipus about the "shameful relationship" Oedipus had with his "closest family" (*OT.* 366).

that the man he knew as his father is not his father, that he has killed his real father, married his mother and is brother as well as father to his children. Oedipus is led to this startling discovery by natural means (on Aristotelian terms) without any signs.³² The turning point, at line 1182, changes his vertical family structure in which he is father and husband into a horizontal alliance in which he is the son of his wife and brother to his children.

When the truth is exposed, and so counter to the Messenger's expectations, Oedipus suffers both astonishment and dismay as he is shifted in an instant by the Messenger's inadvertent information from ignorance to knowledge. From this point on the action necessarily takes a different direction than the one intended by the Messenger — moving from the promise of a kingdom to the chaos of the situation in which Oedipus now finds himself. That his situation involves a corruption of family and a deep sense of desolation only adds to the tragic impact.³³

Oedipus is confronted throughout the drama with details he rejects until at the turning point the full picture is revealed in the moment of recognition. For Oedipus, unlike Electra, it is not the recognition of an individual but confrontation with convincing and previously unknown information that individuals exist in a certain type of relationship. This recognition might be a revelation to Oedipus but when made it is clear that it fits in with the complexities of the plot. Time and again Oedipus is confronted by hints of the truth or its aspects. Some he dismisses, some become part of a gradually revealed truth, but none come to full realisation until the final turning point when recognition occurs. He does not believe Tiresias when he

³² In his 'model' example Aristotle describes how the Messenger hoping to please Oedipus with his news instead discloses the secret of Oedipus' birth (*Poet.* 1452a.33-4).

³³ Aristotle thinks "Suffering" together with "Recognition" and "Reversal", crucial to the plot (*Poet.* 1452b.9-10).

tells him he is Laius' murderer (*OT*. 362) and is indignant when Creon tells him the same (*OT*. 703). He only slowly begins to suspect Laius might be the man he met and killed "at the place where three roads meet" (*OT*. 730). Hearing a description of Laius from Jocasta, Oedipus realises he has "exposed" himself "to a dread curse" (*OT*. 744-5). Oedipus is still sceptical even though Jocasta reminds him of the prophecy that Laius "would die at the hands" of his son (*OT*. 854). At this point Oedipus still has no knowledge that he is Laius' son. It is only with the words of the Corinthian Messenger that he learns the truth about his adoptive 'parents' (*OT*. 1016) and how he was abandoned as a baby (*OT*. 1026), then from the Shepherd, finally, the knowledge that he is Laius and Jocasta's son (*OT*. 1178-81). With the ultimate recognition comes a complete 'reversal of fortune' — the loss of authority over Thebes and the descent into chaos of his vertical family.

Characters other than Electra, Orestes and Oedipus also experience turning points. And a turning point need not be a fresh revelation of truth or fact; changing circumstances can turn on different reasons. For example, there is a point, in *The Libation Bearers* when Pylades speaks (as the 'voice' of divine authority) after being silent from the beginning of the play. The device of silence from a character on stage can play an important part in the dramatic structure to produce a significant moment when the silence is broken. Highlighting a silent moment or having a silent character on stage while others speak draws attention to and places greater emphasis on the words when they are spoken.³⁴ Pylades speaks only three lines but, when he hears his

³⁴ The character Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* says Aeschylus' Niobe or Achilles would be on stage "face veiled, very dramatic, not a word uttered" (*Ran*. 911). (D. Barrett, 1968). Although this supports the idea that after silence came an important speech in Aeschylus' play the other playwrights also used silence as an effective part of dramatic structure. For instance, in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* Orestes and Pylades are led onto the stage, both bound and veiled, for their execution before Iphigenia prays to Artemis and leads them away to safety (*IT*. 1222).

friend's voice, Orestes' hesitation to murder his mother disappears. Pylades is on stage from the beginning until line 584 when he leaves with Orestes and Electra. During this time he is silent. He returns with Orestes at line 638 and again stays silent while Orestes, pretending to be a messenger, explains to Clytemnestra about her son's 'death'. Orestes and Pylades leave at line 718 Pylades still not having spoken. He returns at lines 900-2 to speak his only words telling Orestes to obey the Oracle of Apollo. He does not directly tell Orestes to kill his mother but his words are enough to persuade the hesitant Orestes. Although there has been no need for Pylades to speak before, his few words create a turning point — Orestes' future action is now sealed as convinced he is acting rightly and following divine instructions. He also has the benefit of believing the ultimate responsibility lies in the hands of his friend Pylades.³⁵

Speaking only a few words or not speaking at all while on stage can also portray the *pathos* of a situation. Jocasta is silent on stage for 68 lines listening to the Messenger reveal the facts about Oedipus' adopted parents (*OT*. 987-1055). When the Messenger reveals that Oedipus was found as a baby in the "wooded glens of Cithaeron" (*OT*. 1026), that his ankles had been pierced (*OT*. 1034) and that a shepherd, who was one of Laius' men, had given the baby to the Messenger (*OT*. 1042) it would be obvious to Jocasta (and the audience) that the baby was her own son. She would also assume when she hears Oedipus ask for the shepherd to be brought to him (*OT*. 1045-53) that these revelations will eventually lead Oedipus to know he was the abandoned child, Laius his father and Jocasta his mother. Her

³⁵ Although Pylades appears in Sophocles' *Electra* and in Euripides' *Electra* he does not speak. In Euripides' *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* he does speak in his roles as Orestes' oldest and dearest friend (*Or*. 729) and advisor (*IT*. 104-15).

silence is broken when she pleads for the Messenger's words "not to be remembered" (*OT*. 1057), and after begging Oedipus to resist searching for the truth (*OT*. 1060, 1064) she says she can no longer say anything (*OT*. 1071-2). She realises she is Oedipus' mother and, shocked into silence, she fears, as the Chorus proclaims, "evil may burst forth after this silence" (*OT*. 1075).

4.5 Reasons for matricide and patricide

The replacement of a vertical family structure by horizontal alliances is reached by turning points in which disruption is recognised. Crucial to the moments of recognition and consequent changes of fortune is the fabric of credible reasons offered to justify the 'crimes' of matricide and patricide. Even though Orestes and Electra have not seen each other since they were children each has built up their own reasons for wanting to kill their mother. Love for their father, hatred of their mother, the need to claim their inheritance, claims on status and divine support all justify the belief that they not only have reason but right. In contrast, for Oedipus the reasons occur outside his knowledge and control.

Euripides' Electra, once a royal princess and, because of her mother's actions, now living as a peasant, finds her situation intolerable. She has been made to marry a peasant and live in poverty and squalor. As a bride, Electra has been deprived of the "fineries ... golden necklaces ..." and "setting dances along with the brides of Argos" (*E. El*. 175-9). In a male dominated Athenian society, daughters, unable to pass on family wealth and name, were not considered as important as sons. An Athenian father, if wealthy enough, was expected to provide a dowry (five to

twenty percent of his estate) for his bridal daughter.³⁶ With the death of her father Electra would have expected a dowry and for his wealth to be held in trust for her brother, Orestes. Orestes is the legal heir to his father's fortune, but Electra says that Aegisthus, as well as taking away Agamemnon's wife, has also taken her father's fortune (E. *El.* 1090-1). Bitterly she asks her mother why Aegisthus is not in exile for sending Orestes away, or even killed for making her suffer (E. *El.* 1091-4).

Clytemnestra believes herself a regretful mother who understands that daughters favour their father (E. *El.* 1102-5). To ease her own conscience (E. *El.* 27-31) she gives Electra in marriage to a peasant. There is no dowry and Electra does not go to a comparable household or have a standard of living commensurate with her position as a royal princess.³⁷ In answer to Clytemnestra's justifications for killing her husband the rejected Electra asks, "how is it that having killed your husband you did not attach our ancestral home to us ...?" (E. *El.* 1088-9).

Electra bemoans her fate — she has to weave her own clothes, carry her own water, is badly dressed, and abused by her mother (E. *El.* 241, 304, 309-10).

Euripides presents her peasant husband as a decent farmer who has an excellent character and has looked after Electra in a honourable way but still he is a peasant, poor, and unable to provide a decent, let alone commensurate standard of living for the fallen princess (E. *El.* 35-9). Electra is weighed down by the situation (E. *El.* 64-5, 77-8) — exiled from her home, parted from her brother, her mother and lover, and having other children take her place in the privileged family unit (E. *El.* 58-63).

³⁶ (Foley, 2003. p.65).

³⁷ There is a strong precedent for this serious situation. Euripides' Polyxena, another royal princess, when faced with death says she would rather be sacrificed than live as a slave or be "defiled by some bought-in slave from who knows where" (*Hec.* 352-65).

The contrast between the conditions she finds herself in and the situation she considers her right are too great to bear — not even her kind and considerate peasant husband can ease her pain (E. *El.* 64-6). Knowing her imposed ‘exile’ is due to Aegisthus not wanting her to have a child that might one day kill him, Electra, driven by hatred, carries out her plan. She feigns giving birth, counting on Clytemnestra’s response as a mother who still shows concern for a daughter (E. *El.* 658), or that Clytemnestra may wish to eradicate the threat to her lover of any child born to Electra.³⁸ The nature of the debate between Electra and her mother reveals Clytemnestra as a regretful mother who understands that daughters favour their fathers (E. *El.* 1102-5). Clytemnestra appears concerned Electra is by herself, unwashed and wearing poor clothes (E. *El.* 1107-8). Electra is not affected by this apparent show of concern. Instead she holds onto her deep hatred for the woman who has caused her to be in this position and her determination that her mother must die.

Euripides’ dominant and unhesitant Electra (E. *El.* 1094-5) urges a more cautious and indecisive Orestes (E. *El.* 965-87) to kill their mother. The psychological effect on two young people who have decided (one with determination and one with some uncertainty) to commit matricide leads to remorse and regret. Prior to the killing it is a cautious and reluctant Orestes, unsure about killing the mother who gave birth to him (E. *El.* 964, 969), who asks, “will we really kill our mother?” (E. *El.* 967). Orestes has already un-heroically, and with no hesitation, killed his mother’s lover Aegisthus by stabbing him in the back (E. *El.* 840), in a

³⁸ Electra asks her mother to attend her after ‘giving birth’ and persuades her to enter the house to perform any childbirth rites. Clytemnestra’s willingness to go into the house, despite it being a dirty dwelling, may be, as Kubo suggests, not because of Electra’s persuasion but fear of an unwanted child that might one day threaten her and Aegisthus (Kubo, 1967, pp.27-9).

callous and socially reviled murderous act.³⁹ When faced with killing his mother, Orestes' state of unknowing, threatened only by progressive hints of denied or rejected truth come to a conclusion with the full realisation that he is about to commit a terrible crime. This emotional tension causes a conflict of indecision within him.⁴⁰ Electra brings pressure to bear on him, calling him sinful (E. *El.* 976) if he does not defend his father, and a coward (E. *El.* 982). Finally he agrees to go through with the murder, enters the house and kills his mother, defending his crime saying it is retribution for the murder of Agamemnon (E. *El.* 849). This scene highlights a "moral and emotional revolution (*peripeteia*) in the play".⁴¹

Only after the murder does the full impact of their crime sink in. A remorseful Electra and her accomplice brother are driven into a delirium as they relive their "bloody defiling deed[s]" (E. *El.* 1177) — the murder of a mother whom they now recognise as "dear and not dear at once" (E. *El.* 1230). Orestes realises he will once more be exiled with no friends (E. *El.* 1194-6), and Electra also wonders where she can go and whether she will ever find a husband (E. *El.* 1198-1200). Both have been blind to the consequences of their action. Electra and her brother have joined together to commit matricide but now it seems they will be parted forever. Condemned never to forget the unnatural crime they have committed (E. *El.* 1183-4),

³⁹ The murder of a host is an offence against Zeus Xenios and the Nymphs to whom the sacrifice was intended.

⁴⁰ As an alternative to Freud's interpretation of Hamlet using the "Oedipus complex", Wertham puts forward a view that suggests the "Orestes complex" is a more appropriate model. <http://elsinore.ucsc.edu/Freud/freudOrestes.html>, accessed 01.09.10. The "Orestes complex" describes a "sexually immature but homosexually orientated son, trapped in a dependent but hostile relationship with a possessive mother" (Chiswick, 1981, p.1279). Clytemnestra is not, however, a possessive mother. Orestes may be reacting to rejection by his mother whom he once believed he loved, but the driving force for matricide is to reclaim his inheritance and avenge his dead father.

⁴¹ (Cropp, 1988, p.163).

they are haunted by the voice of their mother when she put her hand on Orestes' face and cried out "my child, I beseech you" before he covered her face with his cloak and with Electra's help killed her (E. *El.* 1215-26).

Aeschylus' Electra is not so pro-active, instead calling for support to the deity Justice (*Cho.* 148, 244) so that the "slayers may be slain in just retribution" (*Cho.* 144). The Chorus of women attending Electra at her father's tomb somehow reduces the isolation she experiences as a potential murderer. The Chorus has told her it is right to repay "an enemy evil for evil" (*Cho.* 123) — *talio* justice. Orestes returns to honour his father and restore his house. He believes he has justice on his side. "War-god shall encounter War-god, Right shall encounter Right" (*Cho.* 461). When Orestes joins Electra he also invokes Justice (*Cho.* 497) to help them go through with their avenging act. When they have killed their mother Orestes says publicly that he committed the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus "with just cause" (*Cho.* 987) and "as the law allows" (*Cho.* 990). At the end of the play Orestes once more proclaims that it was "not without justice" that he has killed his mother, the "polluted murderess" of his father (*Cho.* 1027-8). For both Orestes and Electra their act is retaliation for the murder of Agamemnon and an act built on strong and properly established reasons.

Orestes prays to Zeus for aid stating his need for help to restore his inheritance (*Cho.* 246-63). Electra remains silent from line 245-332 while Orestes firmly sets out his justifications for killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Electra is also on stage and silent when Orestes is talking about Clytemnestra's dreams from line 509 until she exits at line 584. Her silence allows Orestes to explain his reasons for killing their mother. She is not involved in the murder itself. Her role is to keep her meeting with Orestes a secret from her mother and to watch the house and let

Orestes and Pylades know when the gates are open so they can enter and kill Aegisthus first and then Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 554-80). Planned carefully and executed to plan the result, however, is not one of exultation. Once carried out, the vengeful Orestes realises his victory is a “pollution unenviable” (*Cho.* 1017) — a crime justified and reasoned but once committed unbearable and socially isolating the perpetrator and his sister.⁴²

The powerful thematic intention of justice, via its exposure of human choice and set against a background of divine influence, in some ways echoes changes happening in Aeschylus’ own society as it moved from a world influenced by Homeric code to a world created by democratically active Athenians. Aeschylus’ underlying theme of revenge occurring during this transitional phase from *talio* to *dikasteria* justice, offers an examination of how the vertical family structure can be abandoned in favour of sibling alliance, the rationales for a psychology of murder, the seeking of justice and desire to punish wrong doers. Because of the degree of involvement of Apollo the matter of justice in this case is not simple. If Orestes’ decision to murder his mother is freely made, he is fully responsible for his crime and rightly would expect to be judged by a court of law. Were Orestes influenced by Apollo, the responsibility for his crime in the civil world might be diluted but still he faces judgment. Both views show increasing power in the hands of humans and a consequent reduction in the power of the divine. Even so, it takes another divine presence — Athena — who casts the deciding vote for Orestes to be acquitted of murder and restored to his house (*Eum.* 752-61).

⁴² (Parker, 1983, pp.110-30).

Unlike Aeschylus, for *Electra* and *Orestes* Sophocles presents no court of law and no vote by a jury to decide his fate. At the beginning of the play Sophocles' Orestes arrives with his friend Pylades and his tutor, the Old Slave. While he has been in exile the Old Slave tells the audience that he has raised Orestes to avenge the murder of his father. Orestes forms the plan but the Old Slave has caused him to be predisposed to commit the murder, he has raised him to be the "avenger of your father's death" (S. *El.* 14-15). As such the Old Slave has assumed the position of surrogate 'father' and, although significant in Orestes' early life, can only influence but not make Orestes carry out matricide. Convinced his honour is at stake, Orestes has no hesitation justifying the murder of his mother. For Orestes it is "lawful killings" (S. *El.* 39) of both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus that are required and it is up to him to carry them out. He has been brought up to see it as his task and his duty (S. *El.* 74, 76), not just to restore his house but also to restore his rightful inheritance. He will achieve his goals through cunning but will have justice on his side (S. *El.* 1376-82). When he goes into the palace to kill his mother in the same way and in the same place that they killed his father and Cassandra, she pleads with him to have pity on her (S. *El.* 1411). His conviction is overpowering and without any compassion and not answering her he kills her with his sword. Immediately and wanting "to make sure that death is bitter" for his enemy (S. *El.* 1505), callous and vengeful murderer that he is, he orders Aegisthus into the palace to be killed in the same way. Orestes never questions what he has done, believing he is right to punish those who "likes to act against the law" (S. *El.* 1506-7).

Electra supports her brother in his conviction. She believes she will be considered righteous and will have done her familial duty to her father if she avenges his death (S. *El.* 236-50, 970-83, 1089). She tells Chrysothemis she is "resolved to

act” (S. *El.* 947) in order to free herself from the restrictions Aegisthus has imposed. Not to act would mean remaining unmarried and childless (S. *El.* 971). However, more than her wish to be free is the need to punish her mother for the crime she committed when she murdered her husband. Sophocles’ *Electra* and *Orestes* are both deeply convinced that right is on their side indeed that they are instruments for bringing about right.

Alongside the intense emotions of love for a father, hatred for a mother and various levels of divine involvement is the fact that young sons should be able to claim their inheritance and continue the family name. For *Orestes* this is not possible while his mother is still alive, and he is unable successfully to take over their father’s name or wealth. *Orestes* exiled in a foreign land with his father dead and his mother ruling Argos with her lover means that it is impossible for him to claim his inheritance. As an exile he has no citizenship or political privileges yet he is the legitimate son of *Agamemnon* and *Clytemnestra*. As an outsider he cannot honour his family duties and look after the rituals concerning the family graves such as making libations at his father’s tomb. One of *Orestes*’ main objectives on his return to Argos, therefore, is to regain his stolen birthright (*Cho.* 300-1) — a birthright that had been denied him by his mother’s marriage to her lover *Aegisthus* (*Eum.* 754-60) — and so, in effect, to re-establish the vertical relationship with his father.⁴³

In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus* reports the killing of *Laius* in response to *Jocasta*’s expressed concern that something is worrying her husband (*OT.* 769-812).

When *Oedipus* recounts the story of the incident it is obvious that he did not

⁴³ An illegitimate son did not have the same claim on his father’s property as a legitimate son. The citizenship law passed by *Pericles*, in 451 BC, was possibly prompted by the concern that some Athenians married foreign wives so diluting the Athenian blood line (Ober, 1989, p.81). *Pericles*, in order to legitimise his only son left alive after both his legitimate sons had died, made an exception to this law.

recognise the man he killed on the road to Delphi was his father Laius. Although the killing is in one way an act of self-defence, it is not a noble act. It is a gratuitous killing of a stranger built not on any high moral belief but on anger itself drawing upon the arrogance and pride of youth to commit a violent act (*hubris*). The Chorus refers later to the arrogance of the King and that it was this vain insolence that caused Oedipus' ruin (*OT*. 873-88). At the time of the incident Oedipus experiences only anger (*OT*. 807) against the stranger he killed — annoyance at someone barring his way on the road. This spontaneous feeling of anger leads to an impulsive killing.⁴⁴ Oedipus has a propensity for anger. He reveals this in his dialogue with Tiresias when Tiresias refuses to say who had killed Laius (*OT*. 339-40). Tiresias' silence has no effect on the outcome. He knows that even if he does not tell Oedipus what he wants to know Oedipus will eventually find out the truth (*OT*. 341). Oedipus, however, is relentless and still intent on finding out the truth, accuses Creon of slander (*OT*. 513-14). The Chorus tells an indignant Creon that Oedipus made the accusation because he is angry with Creon and did not wait to find out all the facts (*OT*. 524).

Anger and impatience, however, do not mean that Oedipus is morally a bad person. The moral wrong of killing, as he understands it, cannot be directly connected to the terrible outcome that follows from his act. In this way this singular act is at the same time two acts: the killing of another out of temper and impatience known and understood by Oedipus — “he (Laius) paid the penalty with interest” (*OT*. 810-11) — and so readily justified by him; and at the same time the dreadful

⁴⁴ This is a different type of anger from that which Clytemnestra felt towards Agamemnon in Euripides' *Electra*. Here, her anger led her to plot the premeditated murder of her husband (*E. El.* 1110).

killing of his own father which set in motion the rest of the chain of events predicted by the Oracle.

Jocasta's anguish is testimony of what she fears might happen if Oedipus continues his quest to find out the names of his real parents (*OT*. 1060-1). It is not the test of a crime that account should be taken necessarily of all that follows from it although this is part of any crime and it would be unreasonable to hold Oedipus responsible at the time of the act for what could be called 'the killing of his father', but still it is that. Oedipus recognises the pollution that threatens both himself as a killer and his victim's (Laius') family (Oedipus' wife and children).⁴⁵ He believes he can only be cleansed by his self-mutilation and exile from his country so that he cannot see the world and the society he has polluted. Oedipus, once the angry young man is now the loving and sensitive father who can no longer look after his 'children'. The 'father' they knew, now their brother, cries for what their future might hold with no one who will want to marry daughters of such a polluted family (*OT*. 1480-1502). This realisation is highlighted when the blind Oedipus asks to touch his daughters (*OT*. 1480) desperately trying to retain some resemblance of the family he once had.⁴⁶

This patricide exemplifies the horror of that crime because it is done at the time of the act innocently and in that innocence the moral tragedy unfolds for the worse. The dramatic impact of this is therefore greater, even though in the play the full details are not revealed until the dialogue between the Messenger and Oedipus (*OT*. 924-1185) and between the Shepherd and Oedipus (*OT*. 1123-85), on the assumption that the audience knows Oedipus' story and his moral calamity. The act

⁴⁵ (Parker, 1983, pp.316-17).

⁴⁶ (Sommerstein, 2011, p.86).

of patricide here is consolidated by his marriage to his mother and fathering of his own ‘brothers and sisters’, which comes with the breakdown of the vertical family structure ensuing from the initial act. As he says, “I who am revealed as cursed in my birth, cursed in my marriage, cursed in my killing” (*OT*. 1184-5). It is Oedipus’ innocence of the full nature of his crime that is responsible for the moral catastrophe and his final realisation of a truth that is far worse than the act of killing his father.

4.6 Divine involvement

Chaos appears in the human arena where, after killing their parents, human motivation leads to Orestes’ and Oedipus’ madness (*mania*) and pollution (*miasma*). There is, however, a divine context to the killings. The reasons that lead to the change of fortune for Electra, Orestes and Oedipus are not confined solely to reasons affecting human choice, nor are the choices necessarily governed by human freedom. Their ‘fates’ — the destiny, or natural causal outcome for these individuals — has divine influence and predominantly the influence of Apollo. The exertion of this godly power is variable in these tragedies; sometimes it regulates human behaviour, and sometimes its influence is only partial. It is sometimes puzzling where authority for action lies and it is unclear whether the situation of the character is improved by divine intervention.⁴⁷ The portrayal of different levels of liability and degrees of authority held by the gods confronts the fifth century audience with a testing moral dilemma — the gods are dominant and their power undeniable but while humans depend on them and seek their help on many different levels, humans also act

⁴⁷ Criticism of the gods by the characters is a major theme throughout the tragedies (Peake, 2011, p.8).

independently of their wishes.⁴⁸ The consequent and confused tension hinges on the balance between human and divine authority, between the wishes of the gods and the wishes of the humans.

In the plays, the influence of Apollo's divine authority and the reported words of his Oracle show the tension that exists between human choice and a world largely influenced by natural and divine law. As such, divine words that are known about, (e.g. Aeschylus' Orestes says Apollo will never "abandon" (*Cho.* 269) him, which are repeated in the *Eumenides* (*Eum.* 64); used (e.g. Sophocles' Orestes cites the words of Apollo's Oracle to give him instructions to kill his mother (*S. El.* 34-8); or assumed (e.g. Euripides' Orestes implies that Apollo's "decrees are firm" (*E. El.* 399)) are entangled with those of humans and can be seen to come through the voices of the 'children' carrying out the acts they believe are 'sanctioned' by Apollo. In this way divine intervention plays its part in the destruction of the vertical family structure.⁴⁹

Aeschylus describes how the balance of power between gods and humans alters in favour of humans taking more responsibility for their choices and actions. In *The Libation Bearers* Orestes has been told by Apollo's Oracle that he must kill his mother and her lover (*Cho.* 274). Orestes says the Oracle told him he would "stand clear of evil charge" (*Cho.* 1031). This is straightforward divine intervention, but it is in 'addition' to Orestes' pre-existing conviction. Knowing he is at risk from his

⁴⁸ It is possible to see Apollo's influence as having a greater degree of importance and not so much a 'counterbalance'. Flower, for example, believes Apollo's purpose in the tragedies is to "destabilize and problematize popular religious beliefs" (Flower, 2008, p.18).

⁴⁹ Generational conflict is not just restricted to humans. See Introduction for divine sons killing their fathers (i.e. Cronus killing Uranus). Divine sons also plotted against their fathers (e.g. Zeus against Cronus (*Theog.* 487-91). The Furies in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* represent the traditional authority of the older generation of gods in contrast to the younger gods — Apollo, Athena, and Zeus, (*Eum.* 778-92).

mother's Furies, he exiles himself from Argos (*Cho.* 1039) and seeks, and receives the protection of Apollo (*Eum.* 232). When facing a jury at his trial for murdering his mother, Orestes pushes the responsibility away from himself saying in his defence that he felt a great sense of duty to obey such divine intervention — it was “the god's divine injunction; he is my witness” (*Eum.* 594). Any indecision he may have had about killing his mother is now removed by declaring his act was dependent on Apollo's will. Apollo confirms this (*Eum.* 84) and says he will never abandon Orestes (*Eum.* 64). The Chorus of Furies consolidates this saying that Apollo's Oracle at Delphi told Orestes that he must murder his mother (*Eum.* 202). Later, however, Apollo changes his story. He reminds the Chorus of Furies that the Oracle only told Orestes to avenge his father (*Eum.* 203). The Chorus, now challenging Apollo's consistency (if not veracity), enters into a resentful dialogue with him (*Eum.* 204-31). As if to consolidate on the inconclusiveness of this dialogue, and whether or not Apollo should bear responsibility for Orestes' crime it is even unclear when he leaves the stage.⁵⁰ It is the responsibility of another child of Zeus to make a judgement on Orestes' crime of matricide. Although both Apollo and Athena are children of Zeus they are represented as having very different characters. Athena the representative of Zeus (*Eum.* 797) brings justice to the trial of Orestes, whereas Apollo is seen as part of Orestes' decision to kill his mother.⁵¹

⁵⁰ There are a number of possibilities. See Most for a discussion of modern scholarship on Apollo's exit from the *Eumenides* and his opinion that lines 775-7 are spoken by Apollo (Most, 2006, pp.12-18). It is reasonable to accept that the god who has been so important throughout in *The Libation Bearers* and the *Eumenides*, both dramatically and in a religious sense, might have stayed to hear the verdict, spoken the final words of departure instead of Orestes, and then exited with Orestes at line 775. However, his behaviour when he renounced any involvement in ordering Orestes to kill his mother (*Eum.* 202) may be enough to call his authority into question and to leave his departure from the stage unnoticed and unjustified (Taplin, 1997a, p.39).

⁵¹ (Winnington-Ingram, 1948, p.145).

Orestes admits that even if he did not trust what he has been told by Apollo, he knows, like Sophocles' Orestes, that "the deed must still be done" (*Cho.* 298), and he will carry it out with or without divine sanction or approval.⁵² Orestes responds to Pylades' warning about not making an enemy of the gods if he ignores the Oracle of Apollo, but immediately afterwards in conversation with his mother Orestes does not mention the gods (*Cho.* 904-30). Instead his justification for killing her is both the hatred he experiences for Clytemnestra because she abandoned him (*Cho.* 913) and took a lover (*Cho.* 920), and also the debt he owes his father to avenge his murder (*Cho.* 925). A more cautious Electra, not so sure whether she wants her mother dead, looks into herself and questions her own motives as she wonders if wanting Orestes to kill their mother is a "righteous thing for me to ask of Heaven?" (*Cho.* 122). The reply from the Chorus provides the answer — it is right to repay an "enemy evil for evil" (*Cho.* 123). The Chorus does not sanction the crime; it only gives an interpretation in order to support the grieving Electra, but it also acts as Electra's 'voice within' and this positive response confirms to her that the responsibility for avenging Agamemnon lies with his children.

In Sophocles' *Electra* the gods have a strong presence. Apollo's statue and the altar to Apollo are on stage (*S. El.* 634-59) throughout the play and serve as reminders to the audience of an omnipresent divine influence — Apollo is a "silent witness of all that follows".⁵³ But in the action of this play the significance of Apollo's influence on the characters is diminished. Apollo does not command Orestes, and Orestes does not use Apollo as a reason for killing Clytemnestra.

⁵² According to Lesky, Orestes has already decided to kill his mother prior to his arrival on stage (Lesky, 1983, p.22).

⁵³ (March, 2001, p.138).

Orestes, “born of noble blood” (S. *El.* 161), has been to the Oracle at Delphi and learnt how he should, by himself, complete the task (S. *El.* 76) of the “lawful killings” of his father’s murderers (S. *El.* 36-66). The plan to murder Clytemnestra has been clearly explained by Orestes at the beginning of the play — he has already decided what he alone must do (S. *El.* 36). This is a self-assured and confident young man who wants to take vengeance. He does not ask the “gods of his country” (S. *El.* 67) what he should do. Indeed feeling “spurred on by the gods” (S. *El.* 70-1), he says, “I come in all justice as your purifier” (S. *El.* 70).

When Electra prays to Apollo to help them with their plans she asks the god to be “favourable” to them (S. *El.* 1380-2) reminding him of all the “offerings” she has made in the past, hoping that he will now support their ‘just’ act of killing Clytemnestra. Clearly she hopes that Apollo’s support will benefit their project as from this point the Chorus predict the success of Electra and Orestes’ task believing the gods are on their side (S. *El.* 1385-97). When Electra says that Clytemnestra can have no compassion from Orestes as he is about to kill her because she felt no pity for Orestes when she thought he was dead, or felt any pity for Agamemnon when she killed him, it is clear Electra needs no god to tell her what to do — she is motivated only through revenge and hatred to commit matricide. Electra, showing concern for her brother, asks Orestes how he feels after killing his mother (S. *El.* 1424). He replies “all is well within the house, if Apollo prophesied well” (S. *El.* 1425). This answer puts the responsibility onto Apollo, yet Orestes calls himself a prophet — the “best prophet” (S. *El.* 1499) when talking to Aegisthus. Orestes claims the position of seer over Aegisthus’ fate — a “function that overlaps with that of Apollo’s

Oracle”⁵⁴ — knowing that he is about to kill Aegisthus. Here, the balance of power is firmly on Orestes’ side — he believes is on the same level as Apollo with authority over another human being’s life.

Euripides’ version of divine involvement is not so straightforward. For Orestes there is no direct command from Apollo telling him to kill his mother. Similar to Sophocles, Euripides’ presentation of Apollo shows some confusion and tension between divine presence and authority towards human motivation and the decision to commit the crime of matricide. In Euripides’ play, although Apollo’s statue is on stage (E. *El.* 221) and Electra prays to the god for help (E. *El.* 221), his active authority is notably absent. Orestes does not explain the advice given to him by the Oracle (E. *El.* 86-7), although he tells Electra that Apollo’s “decrees are firm” (E. *El.* 399). Later, when Orestes is concerned about committing matricide, he believes Apollo’s decree was unwise (E. *El.* 971) — a sentiment echoed by the god Castor (E. *El.* 1246). Orestes questions Apollo’s prophecy (E. *El.* 981) and along with his hesitation and fears about killing his mother he even doubts the identity of Apollo suggesting a demon had taken the “god’s form” (E. *El.* 979).⁵⁵

These are all indications of the ‘watering down’ of active divine involvement in human affairs. Orestes’ lack of confidence in godly intervention, even though Castor, expressing a more balanced view of divine power, tells him later that Apollo will take the blame for matricide (E. *El.* 1266-7). Electra also has doubts about the support of the gods but she is more ruthless and determined to insist that Orestes

⁵⁴ (Budelmann, 1999, p.181).

⁵⁵ This could be a reference to Athenian suspicions about Delphic meditation (Peake, 2011, p.23). See also Parker for discussion on Athenians’ uncertainty about consulting Apollo (especially before war), as decisions taken democratically in the Assembly rarely needed further assurance (Parker, 2007, p.110). See Dodds for discussion of demons in the Archaic period who he believes “formed part of the religious inheritance of the fifth century B.C.” (Dodds, 1951, p.43).

avenge the death of their father than to pray to the gods for help. She says despairingly that the gods do not listen to her prayers nor help punish the transgressors who killed her father (E. *El.* 198-9), and she will not dance with the Chorus because of her grief for her dead father. In the short exchange with Orestes, as she tries to persuade him to act, she is resolute that there will be no support from a “foolish” Apollo (E. *El.* 972).

The plot of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is based on a divine prophecy — the son of Laius and Jocasta will kill his father (*OT.* 713-14). The plot must therefore hinge upon whether destiny beyond human control will be fulfilled.⁵⁶ There is scepticism about this that calls into question the power of the gods.⁵⁷ The Chorus would sooner have believed that his son, instead of a stranger, killed Laius. This would have fulfilled the prophecy and satisfied their religious beliefs. Because the Chorus believes the Oracle is wrong it thinks the “power of the gods is perishing” (*OT.* 909-10) and asks, “why should we honour the gods with dances?” (*OT.* 895-6).⁵⁸ A concerned Chorus of Theban elders hopes that the gods will look after their king who they fear is arrogant and irreverent (*OT.* 883-94).

There is also divine withholding of information. Apollo told Oedipus that he will kill his father and marry his mother but he did not tell him the names of his real parents (*OT.* 789-90). This partial information causes Oedipus to leave Corinth and

⁵⁶ Oedipus is free to act and responsible for what happens to himself and his family because he discovers by his own free choice that he has fulfilled the prophecy (Knox, 1984, p.149). It is not, however, the act that is the crucial focus of the tragedy, even though it lays the foundation for what will follow in its wake.

⁵⁷ Dodds claims that although Sophocles did not believe the gods were just, he did believe they existed and should be worshipped (Dodds, 1966, p.46).

⁵⁸ See Henrichs for further discussion on the “best remembered and least understood case of choral self-referentiality in all of tragedy” (Henrichs, 1995, p.65).

make the fateful meeting with Laius. When all is unfolded and Oedipus realises he has fulfilled the prophecy and is about to be exiled, like Orestes he blames Apollo for being instrumental in his misfortune (*OT*. 1329, *E. El.* 1266, *Eum.* 609), and his eventual exile (*OT*. 1440-1). Here what Oedipus asserts is true inasmuch as Apollo knew both the future and Oedipus' destiny. There was therefore never any option — the murder was always going to happen. Oedipus says, "It was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who accomplished these cruel, cruel sufferings of mine!" (*OT*. 1329).

On one level the reason Oedipus gives for his misfortune is close to the truth. Creon heard from Apollo that the man who had brought pollution to their land — the murderer of Laius — should be exiled (*OT*. 95-8), or even killed (*OT*. 100-2). Yet, Sophocles' treatment of divine influence in *Oedipus Tyrannus* also comes close to rejecting any authority of the gods. In response to Oedipus' anger about being called Laius' murderer, a concerned Jocasta, in direct criticism of Apollo's Oracle, says that he should disregard the voices of the prophecy (*OT*. 724-5). And she continues, perhaps in fear of the growing suspicion she might have about Oedipus killing her husband Laius, to condemn the prophecy, saying she will take no notice of it because she knows her baby son was left to die on a hillside and could not have grown to kill his father (*OT*. 858). Here, although she is trying to placate Oedipus there is rejection of Apollo's authority. Later knowing her counselling has not worked, she supplicates Apollo to help Oedipus (*OT*. 911-23) but in an attempt to allay Oedipus' fears about the prophecy (*OT*. 994-9) Jocasta does not pray to the gods. Instead she acknowledges the limitations of both god and humans telling Oedipus "man is ruled by chance"⁵⁹ (*OT*. 977-8).

⁵⁹ Translated by H.D.F. Kitto (Kitto, 1998).

Apollo's role in the lives of Electra, Orestes and Oedipus is central to their actions, and is manifest in a voice that is sometimes obvious, sometimes straightforward, sometimes devious and even at times silent. There is, therefore, a varied pattern of behaviour involving gods and humans alongside an acknowledgment of the existence of fate or destiny, which is independent of both. In some situations the gods compel or give direction but leave final choices to humans; in others they openly prescribe the fate, in others they decide on the fate but omit to inform fully those involved. As Jocasta says, the outcome of life may not be a question of choice or pre-determined destiny — all human action being a part of an outcome of chance — only the gods know the future outcome of the complex of chances that form the context of human actions (*OT*. 707-25).

5 SURVIVAL DESPITE THE GODS

ποίας μηχανὰς πλέκουσιν αὖ, κτεῖναι θέλοντες τὴν παναθλίαν ἐμέ;

What further plots are they contriving against my wretched life?

(*Andr.* 66)

5.1 Introduction

The planned killing of Molossos, the attempted murder of Ion and the killing of Hippolytus — the illegitimate and abandoned children in Euripides' *Andromache*, *Ion* and *Hippolytus* — portray the vulnerability of human life against the wishes and influence of their enemies, whether these are parents or the ever-present and powerful divinities. As already seen, killing involving children, whether orchestrated by the gods or by human agency, has important family repercussions.

Just as divine influence lies behind the worst acts of sacrificing children, parents killing children and children killing parents, so it has a part to play in the cruelty of abandonment and the negative social and economic consequences of illegitimacy. Abandonment starkly portrays the vulnerability of children cut off from the protection usually associated with the family environment. It can be seen in different forms — exile for Hippolytus because of divine ordinance, abandonment at birth for Ion because of social conventions, rejection and loneliness for Andromache and her son because Neoptolemus is absent. Abandonment serves to highlight vulnerability and shows dramatically how its effects can destroy the family unit. It

also provides a background for exposing the possibility of human success irrespective of the presence of the gods; the child is placed *outside* the family unit and therefore is, in a sense, less constrained by the norms.

As abandonment and illegitimacy can generate extreme human emotions so can anticipation of murder and its plotting. The intention to kill Hippolytus allows the action to concentrate fully on the motives of those involved (Aphrodite and Theseus) and also highlights the participation of a third party (Poseidon) in the eventual act (*Hipp.* 40-6). In *Ion*, because of the emotional and moral intertwining of Ion and Kreousa there is a reduced opportunity for, or need of, divine involvement. Within the context of anticipating and planning murder against the most vulnerable, the extremes and intensity of love and hate can be tested. Within this arena, the moral complexities of using an outsider as the third party, the Old Man, present difficulties of attribution of responsibility (*Ion.* 978). This can involve the seemingly unavoidable outcomes of fate, the influence of the gods, or the reciprocal generation of hate by hate. In *Andromache*, the intention to kill Andromache and Molossos, initiated by Hermione (*Andr.* 255) and threatened by Menelaus (*Andr.* 380-4), is averted by an older man's (Peleus) words and courage. Although Menelaus, as the third party, is intent on carrying out the act, the central responsibility lies with Hermione as the murderous intending agent.

Dramatically, the associated stigmas of illegitimacy for Molossos, Hippolytus and Ion, in varying degrees, although significant, are revealed ultimately as subordinate to the resultant human emotions. This theme serves to point to the possibility, in *Ion*, of divine inability to control all human affairs and, in *Andromache*, of human success in the face of such reduced power. The erosion both

of social codes and divine control exposes fully the strength of human emotions, and the ways in which they are played out under complex and difficult circumstances.

The situation for Molossos, Hippolytus and Ion generate the *pathos* and extreme emotions necessary to show that humans can unburden themselves from the influence of the gods. When it seems impossible to avoid divine intervention (as in *Hippolytus*), the family suffers. Within the context of the family unit (especially in *Andromache* and *Ion*), the dramatic characters take on responsibility for their actions and reap the rewards of stability that ensues. This is not a separation from the gods, but it is a re-apportionment of responsibility that brings with it a recognition of the benefits of the stability formed within the family unit that has little need for the involvement of divine influence.

5.2 Illegitimacy

Legitimacy was an important aspect of Athenian society at this time. In the sixth century BC Solon had excluded illegitimate children from inheriting their father's property and wealth.¹ Twenty five to thirty years before the performance of *Andromache*, in 451 BC, Pericles took this further and passed a law that denied Athenian citizenship to those who did not have Athenian parents.² On fifth century BC Athenian terms, Hippolytus, Ion and Molossos cannot hope to inherit their father's wealth or name. Yet in *Andromache* and *Ion* the positive outcome is counter to conventional societal rules governing illegitimacy and inheritance: Ion becomes

¹ Responsibility could cut both ways. In Plutarch's "Solon" in *Lives*, a law, assigned to Solon, says illegitimate sons who were born out of wedlock need not look after their parents in old age (Plutarch. *Vit. Sol.* 22.4).

² (Halleran, 2004, p.24). See also Patterson for a comprehensive discussion on 'Athenian Citizenship Law' (Patterson, 2005, pp.267-89).

the inheritor of Athena's land (*Ion*. 1574-5); and Molossos the founder of Molossia (*Andr.* 1248). In these tragedies the term illegitimacy is unsatisfactory because the causal context of illegitimacy is related to the extent that the child is not protected by the societal code. Social norms within the plays are not necessarily those of historical Athens; it is the 'pressure points' that are important.

In *Hippolytus*, however, Hippolytus will never have the opportunity to inherit his father's wealth or land, but for reasons outside human code of law. In this play, Euripides brings out the full strength and overwhelming power of the gods and pits them against a young man defenceless against their desires. On one day, he becomes helpless against the wishes of Aphrodite, a cruel father and an untruthful stepmother, and dies. Family values are destroyed and humans cruelly affected by the gods' involvement in their lives. For Hippolytus, although the issue of illegitimacy has some bearing on how others treat him, it is divine orchestration of his life that causes his downfall.

Notwithstanding his inferior illegitimate status, Hippolytus believes he is the "best of men" (*Hipp.* 1242) who is "virtuous" (*Hipp.* 995) more than any other man (*Hipp.* 1365). This is not the view of everyone. The Nurse describes Hippolytus as a "bastard" who believes he is "legitimate" (*Hipp.* 309), even though Hippolytus knows he is illegitimate (*Hipp.* 1083). This incongruity is because the Nurse wants to frighten Phaedra into telling her secret, and she uses Hippolytus' illegitimacy as a persuasive tool. The Nurse warns Phaedra that, with her death, her children would be looked after by Hippolytus and would not inherit their father's wealth (*Hipp.* 304-10).³ This is a reason for Phaedra to hate Hippolytus — she loves her children (*Hipp.*

³ According to Athenian law Phaedra's children could not inherit because she is a foreigner and neither could Hippolytus because his mother was also a foreigner.

315) — though it is also because she finds her love for Hippolytus so painful (*Hipp.* 347-9). The Nurse's comment is also a description of a proud young man who has "ambitions above his station".⁴ Yet Hippolytus is the "best of men" (*Hipp.* 1242). When reminded of his oath of silence by the Nurse, desperate to protect her mistress (*Hipp.* 611), Hippolytus proves his piety and integrity by agreeing not to denounce Phaedra even though the truth could save his life (*Hipp.* 601-60).

Hippolytus' father also calls his son's legitimacy into question, which is ironic as Theseus is himself illegitimate. Theseus is recognised as the son of the human Aegeus by Artemis (*Hipp.* 1283, 1431), but he calls on his divine father Poseidon to help him kill Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 887).⁵ In his grief for Phaedra's death, and without full knowledge of why she committed suicide, Theseus blames Hippolytus saying the "bastard is naturally at war with the legitimate" (*Hipp.* 962). These are the some of the first words Theseus speaks directly to Hippolytus after finding out Phaedra is dead. In an attempt to save himself, Theseus believes that Hippolytus will try to show that his illegitimacy is the reason why Phaedra hated him. Even though Theseus is illegitimate himself, he rejects Hippolytus, as he does not believe Hippolytus has any values that make him commendable as a son or the son of a king.⁶ Theseus remonstrates about Hippolytus' lack of filial duty. Hippolytus, wanting only to be accepted as a legitimate son, replies bemoaning his illegitimacy. As he is about to be taken away from his father Hippolytus bitterly

⁴ (W.S. Barrett, 1964, p.217).

⁵ (Ebbott, 2003, pp.85-6). When one parent is divine the child, the demi-god, is bestowed with some special favour or quality (e.g. Thetis makes arrangements for Achilles' shield to be made by Hephaestus (*Il.* XVIII.428-70). Theseus, who has both a human and divine father, kills the Minotaur (See Plut. *Vit. Thes.* for different accounts).

⁶ (Roisman, 1999, p.140).

refers to himself as a bastard, and also hopes his friends are not bastards (*Hipp.* 1083). Clearly, at this stage, Hippolytus' illegitimacy is wrongly used as a reason for Theseus' behaviour towards his son and the disintegration of the father and son relationship is based solely on mistrust and accusation.

Hippolytus' illegitimacy is not referred to again until the end of the play when Hippolytus is dying. Now, perversely, he refers to himself as legitimate hoping that Theseus will have other legitimate sons like himself in the future (*Hipp.* 1455). Only at the end of the play does his father believe he has a noble son, although he is unwilling to acknowledge him or his virginity, piety and worship of Artemis (*Hipp.* 1452, 1454). Nevertheless, Hippolytus' suffering is finally over. Theseus and Hippolytus are reconciled, but the cost to Theseus is great as his hatred and need for revenge is replaced by remorse. The dishonour of illegitimacy as a societal stigma used to discredit Hippolytus has little relevance to how Theseus now considers his son. Theseus no longer has any feelings about Hippolytus' illegitimacy, instead he feels "wretched" (*Hipp.* 1460) and responsible for his son's death.⁷

The focus in *Ion* keeps divine intervention firmly in the picture as it centres on the importance of the family that eventually succeeds despite Ion being the son of a god and therefore illegitimate. Ion is a young man without parents or country (*Ion.* 111). Indeed, other than being called Loxias, after the god at whose temple he serves, he has no proper name (*Ion.* 311). However, he does not seem disadvantaged. Living at the temple of Apollo, he has no practical need for a parent and has no idea, nor need to know, that Kreousa is his mother. His religious life, although satisfying to him, prevents any family ties drawn from normal upbringing. Clearly, up to this

⁷ Roisman believes Theseus feels relief at being released from the pollution of kin-killing (Roisman, 1999, p.153)

point, Ion has not suffered the lack of a family life nor any disgrace from being illegitimate. It is only when he is nearing adulthood that Ion's illegitimacy becomes an important issue.

Apollo, trying to legitimize Ion, causes Xouthos to believe the young man is his child (*Ion*. 69-5) and that the child's mother was a Delphian maid (*Ion*. 544-54). In the Prologue, Hermes foretold that Apollo will give a son to Xouthos (*Ion*. 70), and that it would be the first young man Xouthos sees when he comes out of the temple. When Xouthos exits the temple and sees Ion, he is clearly delighted and, regardless of any thought that the child might be illegitimate, claims Ion as his own son (*Ion*. 516). Ion first shows his disbelief that the man in front of him says he is his father — he cannot believe it, and thinks it a joke (*Ion*. 528). Indeed, he claims Xouthos mad (*Ion*. 520) to believe such a thing. Ion rejects Xouthos' embrace and even threatens Xouthos if he attempts to come near him (*Ion*. 525). There is, at this point, no sign of a father and son relationship developing. This episode, so far, has dramatic effect in conveying Apollo's attempt and apparent failure to interfere in the life of his son. As the audience knows Ion is Kreousa's son, the joking between the two men also brings an element of light relief into the play.⁸ In this way it also serves as a pseudo-recognition scene that lays the ground for the later recognition scene between Kreousa and Ion.⁹

The dialogue between Ion and Xouthos serves as a device that shows a conflict between two different generations, and more importantly how illegitimacy has no importance when only personal relationships are considered. The older man

⁸ Here Euripides shows his skill at combining opposite tensions — the comic and the tragic — and how they can successfully interrelate (Silk, 2000, p.54).

⁹ (Lee, 1997, p.215).

does not question what is happening — he believes the “god’s oracle” (*Ion*. 534), and unreservedly holds that Ion is his son. To Ion, Xouthos’ proposition seems impossible. He has lived all his life in the temple protected by Apollo and cannot see how he can be the son of an apparently mad stranger who calls him his “dearest” (*Ion*. 521, 525). Of course, Ion is right but Xouthos persists, and in the end manages to convince Ion that he is his father. This mutual acknowledgement, though, does not change Ion’s legitimacy; he is still illegitimate, as Xouthos was not married to the Delphian maid when Ion was born.

This turn of events does not sit easily with Kreousa who is jealous that Xouthos has a son. She becomes vengeful and indignant when she realises Xouthos has not told her about the child. The irony is, of course, that Ion is her child, not Xouthos’ child. This point is emphasized dramatically when Xouthos tries to put his arms around Ion, a gesture Kreousa was denied when she decided to abandon her child (*Ion*. 519-25). Not realising Apollo has been involved, and now unable to trust her husband, an insecure and vulnerable Kreousa experiences only murderous intentions towards Ion. It is also evident, at this point, that Apollo has failed to make Ion legitimate by giving him a human father. At the end of the play, Athena tells Kreousa that Ion’s true parentage must remain a secret from Xouthos so he can continue to believe the child is his (*Ion*. 1601). Apollo, Xouthos, and eventually Kreousa, when she realises Ion is her son, have all taken a share in trying to legitimize Ion. Ion’s legitimacy, however, has no importance for Athena. She is satisfied that Ion is a descendant of Erechtheus’ line. This entitlement alone gives him the “right to rule” (*Ion*. 1574) her land.

Clearly within the Athenian codified society at this time, inheritance — the right to a name or family wealth — is affected by a claim to legitimate birth within

the context of legitimate marriage. At the same time legitimate marriage and the right to have legal entitlement to inheritance are all parts of a social or socio-legal structure, and do not form part of the intimate relationship between the parent and their child or a child and their parent. Euripides exposes this forcibly as he analyses the psychological aspects of anticipated killing against the background of illegitimacy and reveals a result that favours the more 'natural' human emotion against the 'artificial' social code. At the beginning of *Andromache*, the focus is on the vulnerable position of Andromache and her illegitimate child who Hermione believes pose a threat to her place as Neoptolemus' wife. Despite her position as a concubine Andromache is still a good wife and mother even though her child, Molossos is the result of being raped by her Greek master Neoptolemus (*Andr.* 37-8).

Like Medea, Andromache finds herself alone with her child in a foreign country, but unlike Medea, Andromache's only thought is the survival of her beloved child (*Andr.* 406-18).¹⁰ She loves the illegitimate Molossos with the same passion and care she had for her legitimate child, Astyanax. Hermione, the wife of Neoptolemus, cannot understand Andromache's mentality, preferring to believe that Andromache, as a foreigner, must be ignorant to "sleep" (*Andr.* 170) with the man whose father had killed her husband (*Andr.* 170-5). Hermione's intention, with help from her father, Menelaus is to remove Andromache and her child from her household (*Andr.* 180) because she thinks Andromache is poisoning her to "make her childless and hated by her husband" (*Andr.* 32). Molossos' illegitimacy is of no concern to her. Neither is it for Andromache who reminds Menelaus that

¹⁰ In support of her virtue as a wife and mother she says she would rear Hector's bastard children (*Andr.* 222-8). This further strengthens the character in contrast with the weaker portrayal of Hermione who is the daughter of an evil mother (*Andr.* 228-30).

Neoptolemus will be angry if his son is killed (*Andr.* 340). Menelaus, like Heracles, wants only to kill “the enemy children of enemies” (*Andr.* 519) and the idea of illegitimacy does not have any significance for him either.

The dishonour of illegitimacy as a societal stigma, seen in *Hippolytus*, has little relevance as to how Andromache feels about her child. Molossos is Andromache’s “beloved child” (*Andr.* 510). The full force of the undiluted love a mother has for her child gathers strength when Andromache holds Molossos in her arms as together they face being killed by Menelaus (*Andr.* 504-5). Molossos clinging to his mother sings a plaintive plea asking for help from his absent father (*Andr.* 507), and comfort from his mother (*Andr.* 510-12). Euripides makes Andromache’s son an important part of the dramatic structure by giving him a singing part. It adds *pathos* and gives prominence to the crucial theme of the play — killing illegitimate or legitimate children is not only wrong but destroys the family and any potential for the future of the family.

Molossos’ great grandfather upholds this attitude. Peleus, angry with Menelaus for ravaging his grandson’s house, knows that “many bastards are better than legitimate children” (*Andr.* 638). Although Peleus compares ‘bastards’ to “dry soil” with few prospects (*Andr.* 636) it is obvious that Peleus sees the potential for Molossos. With this conviction, and intending to take Molossos to Phthia “to be a great enemy to these people” (*Andr.* 724), Peleus asks the boy to stand by him and help untie his mother’s bonds” (*Andr.* 723).

The threats these illegitimate children face come from different directions. Even though divinely ordered, a parent’s decision at a crucial point in *Hippolytus*’ life makes him helpless against the disastrous consequences that befall him. While shielded by the confines of the temple and the favourable intentions of his divine

father, Ion is safe until such time as he is exposed to humans who either want to adopt him or kill him. Molossos, safe only while protected by his mother, is in danger not due to any divine intervention but to the murderous intentions of human agents. The outcome for each child is, admittedly, different: for Hippolytus, the result is death brought about by divine intervention; for Ion, reconciliation with his mother regardless of divine intervention; and for Molossos, increased safety under the protection of his mother and great grandfather, again without any divine intervention. Despite these differences, the theme is constant — the level of vulnerability children experience, placing their lives in jeopardy, is inversely proportionate to the level of parental love they receive.

5.3 Abandonment

Euripides' analysis of the role of children in *Hippolytus*, *Ion* and *Andromache* exposes human emotions shaped by social codes, murderous intention and the amount of control humans can maintain in the face of divine power. All of this is possible only because of the vulnerability of the child victims concerned. Children, even young adult children, are more easily victimised and abused if they are left abandoned or isolated.

There is a relationship with blurred connections between ejection, exile and abandonment. Ejection is the forcible removal of someone from a family or social group and involves the act or action of a third party. For example, the Greeks forcibly eject Andromache (*Andr.* 10-15) and Hecuba (*Hec.* 55-8) from their country; and Theseus asks his slaves to forcibly take Hippolytus away (*Hipp.* 1085). All three are ejected by third party actions or demands and as a result go from their country into exile. Exile may be either expulsion from a large social group or country as a

sentence or punishment, or a lengthy period abroad dictated by circumstances or self-imposed. For example, Medea exiled herself from her own country (*Med.* 1-14). Abandonment can mean someone, usually a child, being simply left either without care or in the care of others, but it can also mean an adult being abandoned by someone responsible for their care. Abandonment implies forsaking any interest in the person abandoned. For example, Oedipus, as a baby, was left at Cithaeron to die (*OT.* 1026), and Andromache, as an adult, is abandoned by Neoptolemus (*Andr.* 49-50). Both ejection and exile imply abandonment although someone abandoned may not have been exiled or ejected. Abandonment can be a product of divine ordinance (e.g. for Hippolytus), human neglect at birth (e.g. for Ion), human conflict (e.g. for Ion and Molossos) or murderous intention (e.g. for Ion and Molossos).

Exile places the victim in a particularly vulnerable position.¹¹ Hippolytus is already outside the family and social structure. Even though the only 'mother' figure he relates to is Artemis and being isolated outside the *oikos* leaves him exposed to the schemes of Aphrodite, it is the conflict between father and son that leaves him rejected by a parent, and in so doing brings out the cruel nature of a father prepared to neglect his son. Set in motion by Aphrodite, Theseus is confused into thinking Hippolytus has raped Phaedra. Therefore, Theseus does not have the ability to understand, speak or listen to his son (*Hipp.* 916-46). Theseus is the older and wiser father, but his morality is drawn from a belief in the importance of his reputation as a king.¹² He cannot bear for anyone to see him frustrated by, or in fear of, his young

¹¹ See also, Medea's threatened exile (*Med.* 450, 458, 510-15).

¹² (Mench, 1976, p.75).

illegitimate son (*Hipp.* 976-80).¹³ Hippolytus, on the other hand, a carefree young man with no ties, only wants to hunt and win sporting competitions (*Hipp.* 1016-7). Clearly, father and son find it difficult to relate to each other. The innocent Hippolytus, fearful of being implicated by Phaedra and Theseus' anger,¹⁴ accuses his father of being destructively silent (*Hipp.* 910) saying "there is no place for silence in trouble" (*Hipp.* 911).

The theatrical convention of 'silence' provides a framework for this impasse to occur. Theseus the older man does not like being told how to act by his young son (*Hipp.* 919-20). Even the rationale of his son who says his body is "pure of sex" (*Hipp.* 1003), meaning he could not have raped Phaedra, has no consequence for Theseus. He believes the sight of Hippolytus pollutes him (*Hipp.* 946), and is intent on destroying his son (*Hipp.* 1053-4). Hippolytus cannot understand his father's hatred, as he vainly tries to defend himself. Theseus, reaching the crux of the dramatic action, abandons his son and exiles him, not just from his home and family, but also from the happy life Hippolytus had created for himself.

Theseus says Hippolytus "will wander over a foreign land and drag out a painful life" (*Hipp.* 898). He repeats the same words at line 1049. This repetition

¹³ This father and son conflict is parodied in Aristophanes' *The Clouds*. Here the farmer Strepsiades, worried about the debts his son has run up in the city because of his upper-class lifestyle, moans about his son's long hair, and his love for his horses and chariot (*Nub.* 13-15). This caricatures the older generation's difficulty understanding the younger generation as well as depicting the tensions that occur between a father and a son who is still living at home. The father sees the error of his son's foolish ways, while the son regards his father as being in his second childhood and someone who can easily be shown as mistaken in his wrongful judgements (*Nub.* 1417-18).

¹⁴ Roisman suggests a fearful Hippolytus could have overheard Phaedra's plan to punish him for rejecting her, and that he was not simply wanting to know what had happened when he met his father (Roisman, 1999, p.135).

emphasizes the lack of impact Hippolytus' argument had on Theseus.¹⁵ Theseus' emphatic repetition to exile his son leaves the audience in no doubt that Theseus means, without any reservation, to abandon Hippolytus. Hippolytus pleads for time (*Hipp.* 1051) and a fair trial (*Hipp.* 1055), but like his previous fruitless arguments, nothing said in defence deflects his father from his decision. Hippolytus is to be exiled from the land where he has been so happy knowing he is innocent, but cannot prove his innocence (*Hipp.* 1094-5). The potential vulnerability of his future situation is only increased by his inability to prevent it happening.

Simple abandonment can be further complicated by fear and shame. The consequence of the abandonment for an infant, as portrayed in *Ion*, although not murder, is a social out-casting of the infant and a placing in peril that goes against the underlying codes prescribing care and responsibility and family behaviour.¹⁶ Kreousa abandoned Ion, her newborn child, because she was too ashamed to admit to her father she had been raped by a god and had given birth to an illegitimate child (*Ion.* 338-40).¹⁷ When Kreousa abandoned Ion and put his life in jeopardy, she had no

¹⁵ Both W.S. Barrett and Halleran believe the repeat at line 1049 is genuine and not an interpolation (W.S. Barrett, 1964, pp.357-8) and (Halleran, 2004, pp.239-40).

¹⁶ This is reflected later in Plato's *Lysis* where, if a "man sets a high value upon a thing" a father will value his son more than anything (*Lys.* 219.d). In Plato's *Laws* there is an example of how parents look after their children. Here an Athenian says that "while the helplessness of childhood lasts" a child "is attached to his parents and they to him" (*Laws.* 754b). Similar sentiments about responsibility towards children are found in Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* by the Nurse who had charge of Orestes when he was a baby (*Cho.* 743-65), in Sophocles *Ajax* by Teucer (*Aj.* 986-90) who is concerned for the son of Ajax after the death of Ajax, and in Euripides' *Orestes* by Orestes who remembers how Tyndareous looked after him when he was a child (*Or.* 463-6).

¹⁷ In Golden's article about female exposure in Athens he comments about the number of times in *Ion* that Euripides mentions Kreousa abandoning her child (M. Golden, 1981, p.331) The abandonment of Ion is mentioned five times in the play (*Ion.* 10-27, 340-45, 896-900, 950-9, 1473-99). On the basis that Euripides had a "preoccupation with contemporary problems" (Grube, 1941, p.10) it is reasonable to suppose abandonment evoked contemporary concerns. Indeed, patterns in Euripides' tragedies, regarding the causes for abandonment, the harmful consequences for the family and the fortunes of the children, also appear in fragments from his plays such as: *Alexandros*; *Captive Melanippe*; *Antiope*;

deliberate intention to murder her child.¹⁸ Perhaps in the hope that Ion would be saved, Kreousa dressed him with what she had, put him in a basket with a piece of weaving (*Ion*. 1417) edged with a pair of snakes (*Ion*. 1423), a necklace (*Ion*. 1431) and an olive branch (*Ion*. 1433).¹⁹ This effort connects strongly to affection and such actions point to a belief that she did not intend, nor even believe, the baby would die. Her torment is obvious. She has all the instincts a mother could experience for her baby — crying when the baby stretched out his hands to her, knowing she cannot take him home (*Ion*. 959-61) — but these are made even more agonising by her unavoidable need to abandon him because of social conventions. As an unmarried mother of royal parentage she would bring shame to her family if exposed. The outcome is that Ion does not know the circumstances of his birth nor who abandoned him at the temple.

Andromache portrays a chain of human vulnerability. Andromache is abandoned first by the death of her husband, Hector and their son, second by being forcibly taken from her home to exile in a foreign country, and finally by Neoptolemus who leaves her alone when he goes to Delphi (*Andr.* 51-5). This is a

Oedipus; *Danae*; *Melanippe (the Wise)*; *Alope*; *Phaethon*; and *Auge*. This is a strong indication of the topicality of the subject and its interest for Euripides.

¹⁸ Boswell defines abandonment of newborn babies in both Greek and Roman times as the “voluntary relinquishing of control over children by their natal parents or guardians, whether by leaving them somewhere, selling them, or legally consigning authority to some other person or institution” (Boswell, 1988, p.24). Oedipus in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* is ‘exposed’, deliberately left to die in the “wooded glens of Cithaeron” (*OT*. 1026), with his ankles pierced so he could not move. As in *Ion*, the plans to kill the child do not come to fruition because he is rescued.

¹⁹ Evidence of exposure in fifth century Athenian society is limited due to a scarcity of archaeological, demographical and literary sources. Golden thinks the exposure of babies, especially girls, was “common” at this time (M. Golden, 1993, p.87). Boswell prefers to use the word “abandoned” as it is less emotive than the word ‘exposed’, and believes abandoned children were often saved by the “kindness of strangers” (Boswell, 1988, p.49).

nostos play in which Neoptolemus is expected to return home.²⁰ Yet, at the beginning, the focus is on the abandonment of Andromache by Neoptolemus and her feeling of abandonment from her Trojan family and home. Andromache, in the Prologue, stresses her suffering and explains how she has come to be in such an utterly “wretched” (*Andr.* 6) and unfortunate situation.²¹

Andromache is inextricably caught in a pattern of abandonment. She recalls nostalgically how, as a slave and concubine she was brought by Neoptolemus to his palace (*Andr.* 1-10). Her dependence on Neoptolemus for protection was compounded when she had their child (*Andr.* 25), but after his marriage to Hermione (*Andr.* 29-38), Neoptolemus rejected Andromache when he left their marriage “bed” (*Andr.* 35).²² Andromache realises an absent Neoptolemus cannot save her (*Andr.* 50); and worse, she realises he cannot save their son. Neoptolemus as a husband and protector is vital for Andromache’s safety. As Menelaus reminds her, if “she loses her husband she loses her life” (*Andr.* 373).

Andromache’s description of why Neoptolemus is absent accentuates her feeling of loneliness and fear of what could happen, not only to her, but also to her son (*Andr.* 50-5). Her isolation is reinforced when the Slave Woman points out to Andromache just how vulnerable she and her son are to the murderous intentions of Hermione and Menelaus (*Andr.* 62-3). When pressed, the Slave Woman tells Andromache that they intend to kill her son (*Andr.* 68). Andromache, fearful for the

²⁰ Neoptolemus only returns as a corpse (*Andr.* 1167-7). He does not come home a hero to save Andromache and his son like Heracles in *Heracles*.

²¹ There is no criticism of Hector as there is in the *Iliad* when Andromache bemoans her own fate and that of her orphaned son after Hector has been killed (*Il.* XXII.476-515, XXIV.725-45).

²² There is some similarity here to Medea’s situation. Andromache, however, has no feelings of revenge or plans to kill her child.

life of her son, understands just how abandoned she is by her friends and more importantly by Neoptolemus who “still delays at Delphi” (*Andr.* 76). The Slave Woman agrees that Andromache would be better off if Neoptolemus were present (*Andr.* 77-8). Andromache does not need to be told, she is fully aware that, as a slave and without Neoptolemus and any friends, her situation is hopeless. Menelaus reinforces this when he entices Andromache out of sanctuary and says, “slaves should never insult the free” (*Andr.* 433-4). Abandoned by her husband and friends Andromache and her son prepare to die. At the last moment, she and her child are not abandoned. Peleus, angry that his grandson’s slave and great grandson are about to be killed, comes to their rescue.

5.4 Murderous intention

The blatant and obvious fear of Andromache and Molossos, the simple twist of fate in the case of Ion, and the conspiracy played out in the face of the innocent Hippolytus expose these victims to the murderous intentions of their enemies and their parents. The circumstances of each potential victim are easily recognisable as features of human conduct. With the highlighting of these psychological implications comes an awareness of the nature of victimization when applied to the defenceless, weak or vulnerable. This, as it places the victims vulnerable to both human and divine forces, makes it a crucial aspect of the tragic functioning of the unfolding dramas. Yet vulnerability is sometimes double-edged. Victims are often defenceless and, without help, unable to prevent what is about to happen, but the people who have murderous intentions or attempt murder can also be at risk. For example, Hermione is vulnerable to her jealousy of Andromache and becomes even more isolated when Menelaus abandons her and she is left alone, fearful of Neoptolemus’

return (*Andr.* 730-45). Both Ion and Kreousa experience vulnerability and power in turn according to who has murderous intentions and who is the victim. For Hippolytus and Theseus, both are vulnerable to each other's feelings and actions, but even more they are vulnerable to divine power and intervention.

Despite the differing outcomes in these plays and degree of divine involvement, a category of 'murderous intention' (i.e. putting the lives of children under threat or placing the lives of others in jeopardy) binds them together and directs the characters (as victims of an ultimate social sanction) towards another object. These forces can also be created indirectly by the 'murderous intention' of someone who directs the actions of a third party to commit the murder. A murderous intention precedes murder but murder does not necessarily follow from murderous intention. Sometimes the intention is unfulfilled by the act of murder. Sometimes the intending agent uses a third party who carries the intention forward to the act of murder or attempted murder. The agent with the intention carries the moral responsibility for the murder carried out by another. There are three different types of homicide in Attic law: "deliberate murder"; "justifiable homicide" (e.g. self-defence); and "involuntary homicide committed under constraint", which included "deliberate homicide committed in the mistaken belief that it was justifiable".²³ It is this last category that Euripides explores in these three plays: Hermione mistakenly believes Andromache will poison her (*Andr.* 30-5); Theseus wrongly believes Hippolytus raped his wife (*Hipp.* 877-80); and Kreousa incorrectly thinks Ion is the child of Xouthos (*Ion.* 776).

²³ (W.S. Barrett, 1964, p.413).

In *Hippolytus*, notwithstanding the murderous intentions of the humans, divine influence holds its normal priority. Aphrodite says she will make sure Theseus will kill his son (*Hipp.* 41-5), but it is another god, Poseidon acting on behalf of Theseus (his son), who will set the killing in motion. This is not the case in *Ion* or *Andromache*. Even though there is initially divine intervention in *Ion*, it is an outsider to the family unit — the Old Man — who will attempt to murder Ion on behalf of Kreousa. There is no divine intervention at all in *Andromache*. Hermione, out of sexual jealousy and fear, plans with her father to kill Andromache and her son Molossos (*Andr.* 40).

It is not the act itself (contrary to expectations) but the intention to commit murder and the plotting that reflects in the tragedies the human and divine propensity to transgress the most fundamental moral codes that generally regulate family life and relationships. Because the act is always in anticipation, the dramatic analysis concentrates on the psychological aspects that may precede murder, not the act of murder itself and its immediate affects. Murderous intention and abandonment are different from killing not only in their obvious character but in the way that the dramatic structure can be exploited using characters in the emotional turmoil of anticipating a crime, or even acting out a role as a component in something which has, for the moment, only future potential.

Hippolytus is unquestionably the victim of a malicious goddess, Aphrodite, and the malevolent lies of Phaedra. Although Theseus has a murderous intention towards his son (*Hipp.* 886-90), it is Aphrodite who causes this to happen. She is the prime mover so to speak, the ultimate initiator of murderous intention who intends to “punish Hippolytus this day” (*Hipp.* 20-3) for the wrongs he has done to her. In this case, it is the god Poseidon as the third party who causes the death of Hippolytus,

even though, as Hippolytus' divine grandfather, he might have protected a member of his human family. Instead he honours the three wishes he gave Theseus his son, but neither he nor Theseus can resist the divine malevolence of Aphrodite who is centrally responsible for the actions of the humans as they play out the desires of the goddess.

Aphrodite causes Phaedra to experience the erotic feelings she has for Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 25-6). This results in Phaedra committing suicide and leaving a letter incriminating Hippolytus. By doing this, Phaedra knows she will implicate Hippolytus and cause him harm, but not on the scale that Aphrodite plans. The goddess, continuing with her plan, reveals to Theseus what has happened knowing that he will kill Hippolytus by calling in a curse his divine father, Poseidon "gave to Theseus as a gift" (*Hipp.* 42-5, 886-90). It is obvious Poseidon listened to Theseus, for as Hippolytus is driving his chariot into exile he is almost killed when a bull-shaped monster comes out of a supernatural wave and frightens his team of horses making them bolt and overturn his chariot (*Hipp.* 1173-1240). Hippolytus is mortally injured and his broken body is brought home to Theseus (*Hipp.* 1341). In this way, Theseus acts "with a power that is reserved for gods alone — his wish, expressed in speech, becomes fact".²⁴ Theseus seems just as responsible as the gods for having murderous intentions towards his son. He cannot contain his anger towards Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 882-3) choosing instead to speak his thoughts to the gods, cursing his son and calling on the gods to hear him and grant his wish (*Hipp.* 889).

Like the gods who have no regard for humans nor any consequences of their actions, Theseus has not stopped to give any thought to the consequences, nor has he

²⁴ (Knox, 1983, p.319).

investigated the situation fully. His hatred for Hippolytus is all too evident when he says for Hippolytus “a quick death is easiest for an unfortunate man” (*Hipp.* 1045). Yet, even though Theseus has much to answer for, Artemis provides him with an excuse when she tells him that he was in “ignorance” (*Hipp.* 1433) when he killed Hippolytus.²⁵ Although Theseus meant to kill Hippolytus he did not mean to do wrong. In other words it could be considered it was Hippolytus’ fate to die.²⁶ It is true that Theseus had murderous intentions towards his son but he is only the agent of Aphrodite who planned the revenge, and Poseidon who carried it out. It is difficult to apportion grades of blame or responsibility for a murder. Without the intention it cannot happen. In the case of Hippolytus, although Theseus made the choice to call in one of the curses his divine father had promised him, he knows, as does Hippolytus, that they were both “tripped up in [our] judgment by the gods” (*Hipp.* 1414). Both realise they have been deluded by the gods and curse them for ruining their lives.

The responsibility for the attempted murder of Ion does not lie with the gods but with Kreousa. She is determined Ion should die — it is “her dearest wish” (*Ion.* 979) — and that the Old Man will be his killer (*Ion.* 1019). There is no divine influence here; Apollo would not wish his son dead. It is the intention of a human that another human should die. The Old Man has persuaded Kreousa that Ion should die, and Kreousa then decides how and when Ion will be killed. At this stage Kreousa obviously has no knowledge Ion is her son otherwise the planned murder would not

²⁵ W.S. Barrett translates the word “ἄκων” (*Hipp.* 1433) as “‘innocently’” (W.S. Barrett, 1964, p.413). Liddell and Scott translate it as “against one’s will, perforce” or “involuntary” (Liddell & Scott, 1909).

²⁶ Euripides’ characterization of Hippolytus reveals a young man whose nature brings about his death (W.S. Barrett, 1964, p.413).

be happening. Believing herself betrayed by her husband Xouthos, who has claimed Ion as his illegitimate son (*Ion*. 808, 864), Kreousa's only thought is the "sweetness of revenge" (*Ion*. 1027). Kreousa, although separated from the actual killing is, as instigator of the attempt, still culpable. As the Old Man says, "it will be thought you did away with the boy, even if you are not the killer" (*Ion*. 1024).

Full of hatred for Ion, Kreousa hopes her plan will be successful but when it fails she fears for her life and again she feels betrayed (*Ion*. 1250). Ion retaliates intent on killing her. The hatred they experience for each other is later dissolved when Ion and Kreousa realise they are mother and son and Kreousa's fear is replaced with 'delight' (*Ion*. 1449). Kreousa has experienced contrasting emotions in quick succession —murderous intentions towards a stranger and then, on the turn of a fact, delight and joy for the same stranger when she realises he is her son. The credibility of this switch is poised delicately on her unknowing. She has been persuaded to believe she must kill Ion — it was not her original intention.

Both the Chorus and the Old Man have played their part in suggesting to her that Ion should die. When the Chorus tells Kreousa she will never have a child or hold one in her arms (*Ion*. 761) the audience know, from the Prologue, this is untrue (*Ion*. 15). The Chorus cannot know whether this is true or not, yet it is their conviction and assertion that it is the truth which drives Kreousa into "yearn[ing] for death" (*Ion*. 763) and leads to her desire to want to kill Ion. Consequently her decision is based upon unreliable information from a third party. The motivation to kill is drawing upon an inner human capacity to act that relies only on perceived 'fact' — absolute truth is not a necessity for wrongdoing. Kreousa is faced with the false testimony of the Old Man that Xouthos has an illegitimate son and is planning to kill her (*Ion*. 846).

Kreousa believes she has no alternative but to seek revenge by instigating the murder of Ion. The Old Man has successfully convinced Kreousa that she should act before her husband kills her and together they form a plan to carry out the murder (*Ion*. 850). Kreousa sends the Old Man to Ion with a goblet of poison (*Ion*. 1029-38), but before Ion can drink it, a servant, it is reported by the Servant, spoke “an ill-omened cry” (*Ion*. 1188-9). This cry is presumably initiated by Apollo to save his son. Ion, fearful at being irreverent, will not use the contents of the goblet as a libation to the god and requests new wine. When a dove dies after drinking the discarded wine, Ion realises someone has tried to murder him (*Ion*. 1190-1204). He questions the Old Man who reluctantly reveals that Kreousa had plotted to kill Ion (*Ion*. 1215).

The discovery of Kreousa’s murderous intentions and the consequent attempted murder causes Ion to reciprocate in kind. Almost at once he galvanizes similarly strong murderous intentions towards Kreousa. Once a naïve, happy and contented servant of the temple, Ion becomes a vengeful young man so full of hatred that he wants to murder Kreousa (*Ion*. 1219-25). When he realises Kreousa, aware of what has happened to the Old Man, has sought sanctuary Ion’s desire to kill her only increases. Once the carer of Apollo’s temple Ion now becomes its desecrator as he seizes Kreousa who is clinging to the altar (*Ion*. 1266). Like Menelaus, Ion has no fear of divine wrath and violates the sanctuary of Apollo without a second thought. This portrayal of a defenceless woman seeking sanctuary is part of a dramatic structure that brings the conflict between mother and son to a climax. When Ion and his attendants enter the stage in pursuit of Kreousa they do so “at a run with swords

in their hands” (*Ion*. 1259).²⁷ Mother and son do not know each other, but the dreadful outcome of a son murdering his mother is averted. Just in time, the Priestess arrives and prevents the killing.

Wrongdoing is evenly spread; both mother and son have attempted to kill each other, both have felt vengeance and had murderous intentions, and both have tried to commit murder on the sacred ground of Apollo. When they discover their true relationship, both experience remorse because each is to blame. Both Ion and Kreousa bear a moral responsibility for not only wanting the other killed but also for initiating the process to carry out their plan. Kreousa has the murderous intention, and instigates the action. The Old Man, however, as third party, initially appears to be more determined than Kreousa that Xouthos should die, and ultimately that Ion should die (*Ion*. 836-53). Even though Kreousa believes she has strong reasons to kill Ion and instructs the Old Man, he appears as much to blame because of his earlier persuasive tactics, his loyal feelings towards Kreousa (he calls her his “dearest child” (*Ion*. 1018)), and his willingness to follow her instructions (*Ion*. 1029). Ion, though, must bear the sole responsibility for being both the agent with the murderous intention against Kreousa and also the agent who attempts to act out the murder.

In *Andromache*, again it is a human who, without any divine influence, makes the decision to kill another human. Hermione, jealous of Andromache as the other woman in her husband’s life and house (*Andr.* 245, 255, 257), threatens to kill her. However, it is a third party — her father Menelaus — and not Hermione who will attempt to murder Andromache and her son. Andromache reminds Menelaus that if

²⁷ During a performance of Euripides’ *Cresphontes* (about 425 BC) the audience is reported to have jumped to its feet in terror when Merope tried to kill the man she thought had killed her son, without realising the man was in fact her son (Cropp, 1995a, p.146). Cropp discusses different ancient sources to consider whether Merope tried to kill her son on stage, or whether she went off stage into a room for the attempted murder (Cropp, 1995a, p.146).

he takes her from the altar by force then he must run the risk of punishment by the gods (*Andr.* 439). Menelaus, who is ready to violate her sanctuary and so incur divine punishment in order to kill her (*Andr.* 440), is also capable of lying. The plan is already in place. Menelaus tells Andromache he has her son and if she does not come out of sanctuary Molossos will be “slaughtered” (*Andr.* 315) instead of her.

With her son’s life in danger Andromache succumbs to this deception. Menelaus seemingly has no respect for the gods because his intention to kill Andromache and her son dominate his thinking. His only intention is to kill both mother and child (*Andr.* 425-30). Menelaus has the role of the intended murderer but his daughter, whose desire it is that Andromache and her child should die, is guilty of instigating this intention. Hermione is envious of Andromache even though she considers Andromache a slave (*Andr.* 154), and a foreigner (*Andr.* 173-7). It is Hermione’s belief that Andromache means to take possession of her house and husband and indeed use poisons to make her childless (*Andr.* 154-60. Andromache is defenceless against Hermione’s resentful intentions and is unable to prevent Menelaus from attempting to kill her and Molossos. Yet Hermione is also vulnerable. She too has family problems (*Andr.* 249). Her husband “loathes” (*Andr.* 205) her, she is childless (*Andr.* 33) and her mother, Helen, is held responsible for the Trojan War (*Andr.* 248). It is therefore understandable that she is jealous of the other woman in Neoptolemus’ life and wants to kill her. Hermione is determined to kill Andromache (*Andr.* 255), and she will “bring fire against” (*Andr.* 257) her enemy to ensure her death. Even though it is Menelaus who lays the trap for Andromache it is his daughter who must take the ultimate responsibility of wishing for and putting into action the murder of another human.

As Andromache and her son plead for their lives, Menelaus stands threateningly above them as he prepares to kill them (*Andr.* 547). It is at this moment that Peleus, the great grandfather of Molossos, arrives. With the power and authority of a king, his walking staff (*Andr.* 588) and harsh attacking words (*Andr.* 590-641), Peleus stops Menelaus from committing the murders. The use of objects in the dramatic structure provides a high point in the play. The aged, but heroic Peleus holding his walking staff high in the air thwarts Menelaus, the warrior with his sword raised ready to strike. Menelaus' intention to murder is terrifying to the bound Andromache and her young son who clings to his mother (*Andr.* 501-5), yet it is the good intentions of Peleus that achieves their rescue.

Peleus, an old man, braves Menelaus, the Greek warrior, someone who has been victorious at Troy, and is now acting on behalf of his daughter to murder a woman and an illegitimate child. Menelaus, after trying to defend his deceitful behaviour towards Andromache (*Andr.* 647-67) is subjugated by the noble Peleus and backs down as the power of Peleus' authority and commitment thwarts even an experienced soldier. Menelaus, conscious that his wife Helen left him for a Trojan prince so causing the Trojan War, did not have the courage to kill her when they met (*Andr.* 684-5). Such a man, is now unable to carry out the murderous intentions of his daughter. The intention to kill, initially released with such anger, is dissipated by Peleus' power of words, good sense and determined action. The threat of murder disappears. The child and his mother are saved, and a killing is averted.

Analysis of murderous intentions towards children (whether brought to fruition, or not) raises fundamental questions including: with whom moral responsibility lies; the third party murderer or the agent with the murderous intent. This delicate nuance, which for the most part holds the dramatic action in the field of

anticipation and planning, reveals something of human choice which, unlike the more brutal fact of actual killing, allows a human outcome more controlled by humans and sometimes even immune from divine influence. This confusion of responsibility when a third party is involved portrays levels of the erosion of divine power. For example, because of the divine plans to kill Hippolytus, the gods control the humans and share, if not dominate, in their wrongdoing. In *Ion*, the plan to kill Ion is again human, though there is some divine intervention, and so the gods share some responsibility with the humans. In *Andromache*, the plan to kill Molossos is made solely by humans, there is no divine control and the gods do not share wrongdoing. The eventual outcomes in *Ion* and *Andromache* are more in keeping with human desire for the continuation of the family. In these ways, light is thrown on the balance of power and influence held in tension between the wishes and desires of humans and gods.

5.5 Divine influence

Utilising a dramatic structure that accentuates the importance of the loving family but which then sees it destroyed or affected by the behaviour of parents or vindictive gods forcefully reveals the potential for human cruelty in the family — a place generally acknowledged as a haven of safety.²⁸ In tragedy sometimes the balance of divine and human influence tips in favour of the humans. It is within these extreme and emotionally testing circumstances that humans find that the potential of the family unit and the understanding of the human condition lead to a neutralising of the

²⁸ Athenian children were part of complex but inclusive “family-based social groups” (M. Golden, 1993, p.25). See Golden’s Chapter 2 ‘The Child in the Household and the Community’ (pp. 23-50), for more detail on the Athenian child’s upbringing within the safety of the *oikos*.

influence of the gods and an emancipation of power for humans. The future for humans, some plays seem to imply, can be an outcome of their own actions and responsibilities. Instead of being pawns in the hands of the gods the family is used to demonstrate the potential moral grounding humans can build in their own lives.

As in *Heracles* and the *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus* reflects from the outset a more rigidly defined external divine influence where the gods orchestrate events. In *Hippolytus* it is evident at the beginning of the play that divine intervention will order events and direct the actions of the humans (*Hipp.* 1-50). In the Prologue, Aphrodite proclaims herself “powerful” (*Hipp.* 1), making it clear what will happen and that she has the authority to order events and dominate humans. She prefers humans who worship her, as do all the gods (*Hipp.* 8-9), and will punish those who are irreverent to her. Here, the balance of power is firmly with the gods and the human agent, Theseus, is directed by divine control to seek the death of his son. In *Ion* the whole train of events stems from covert divine intervention, but this does not prevent human interaction that sets the seeds of human doubts, shame, remorse and guilt. The play concludes with the actions of the humans in a reversal that brings about a satisfying harmonious contentment for Kreousa and Ion (*Ion.* 1437-48). The balance of power has swung away from the divine in favour of the normally less powerful human; human choices are made that bring about “a blessed fate” (*Ion.* 1605) and the bonding of the family unit.²⁹

²⁹ In translation there are multiple uses of the word “εὐδαιμονία”. Generally, the standard translation of the term is “prosperity” or “happiness” (Liddell & Scott, 1909). In *Andromache* Lloyd translates “εὐδαιμονος” (*Andr.* 873) and “εὐδαιμονοῦντας” (*Andr.* 1249) as “prosperity” to describe good fortune, and “εὐδαιμονεῖ” as “happiness” to describe the unfortunate who are childless (*Andr.* 420) (Lloyd, 2005). In *Hippolytus* Halleran translates “εὐδαιμονοίης” (*Hipp.* 105) as being “fortunate” when the Servant hopes Hippolytus will act sensibly, and “εὐδαιμονα” (*Hipp.* 1096) as “happiness” to describe how Hippolytus felt when he was young in Trozen (Halleran, 2004).

In *Andromache*, divine intervention is negligible; humans act out their passions and without the presence of the gods so that the family reconfigures and finds its strength regardless of any divine involvement.³⁰ Through the characterization of Hermione, *Andromache* portrays the consequences of the fear that an illegitimate child and his mother may mean more to her husband than to her. Coupled with a deceiving Menelaus both are tightly bound to the internal influences of the human psyche.

Admittedly, the absence of divine interference would render certain events impossible. For example, Theseus could not have called on Poseidon (his divine father) to fulfil the curse to “make an end” of Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 887-90). If Apollo had not intervened it would have been impossible for Ion to be found and reared by the Priestess and then reunited with his mother. It is a goddess who tells Peleus that his great grandson, even though illegitimate, will continue the family line (*Andr.* 1243-52). It would seem that the gods — vengeful or benevolent — cannot control human passions, neither can they stop humans voicing their disapproval of the gods. In *Ion*, Kreousa, Xouthos and the Old Man repeatedly express disapproval of Apollo’s neglect and abandonment of Kreousa and Ion. It is Ion who says that Apollo should not punish humans for being immoral if the gods are themselves lacking moral values. They should, he thinks, obey the same laws as humans (*Ion.* 439-43). In *Hippolytus* the servant suggests that “gods ought to be wiser than mortals” (*Hipp.* 120), and the Chorus hope that the gods care for humans and can forgive the stupidity of youth, and understand human weakness. The Messenger in *Andromache*,

³⁰ Burnett classes *Ion* and *Andromache* as “melodrama” but accepts that this term is not without its problems as not all the plays have a happy ending and the effects are not “chiefly” of horror or sensationalism. The plots do not show the “power of mere accident”, and are “non-Aristotelian” as they mix “actions of catastrophe with others of favourable fortune” (Burnett, 1971, p.1).

goes even further when, knowing that the god has a vengeful nature, questions Apollo's justice (*Andr.* 1160-5).

Although at times it seems humans are at the mercy of the gods' whims and caprices and must give complete devotion or risk punishment, as in *Hippolytus*, this is too simplistic an interpretation. In *Ion* to some extent but mainly in *Andromache* the varying levels and amounts of divine intervention emphasize the shift of power and responsibility from god to human. For Hippolytus this level of power and participation is far greater, for instance, than for Ion or Andromache. In *Hippolytus*, a vengeful goddess destroys his family, already one that is dysfunctional, whereas in *Ion*, a more benevolent god helps to rebuild and make safe the family.³¹ Euripides, in both *Ion* and *Andromache*, also shows how, even if the gods orchestrate events, humans marginalise the gods, and the more powerful family finds its strength regardless of divine influence.

It is an unforgiving and powerful Aphrodite who is determined to destroy Hippolytus for his refusal to acknowledge her, his outspoken condemnation of her (*Hipp.* 12-22), and his allegiance to Artemis.³² Aphrodite, not content with just one life, will also sacrifice Phaedra's and ruin Theseus' life in her desire to punish Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 1400-4). This is not a god for humans to admire. For Hippolytus, Aphrodite is the "most vile of divinities" (*Hipp.* 13) and Artemis is the "greatest of divinities" (*Hipp.* 16).³³ Here the two gods are working as opposing forces: on the one hand Aphrodite proclaiming what is to happen and that there is no way of

³¹ Pentheus in the *Bacchae* suffers like Hippolytus from the destructive forces of a god he has insulted.

³² To emphasize the dominance of these two gods both their statues are on stage, and both appear as characters — Aphrodite in the Prologue and Artemis at the end entering as a *dea ex machina*.

³³ Gregory suggests Hippolytus' worship of Artemis contrasts his disregard of Aphrodite and that the two are inseparable (Gregory, 1991, p.56).

preventing it; and on the other Artemis later explaining how the tragedy could have been avoided.³⁴ In *Hippolytus*, regardless of whether a god or a goddess is good or bad, they influence and motivate characters' actions. Aphrodite and Artemis are working in opposition as Hippolytus' life is set by his allegiance to one god and his hatred of another. Hippolytus worships Artemis (*Hipp.* 61), believes he has a special relationship with the goddess that no other human can ever have (*Hipp.* 84-5) — she is, he says, his “companion” (*Hipp.* 85). This association condemned by Aphrodite as unnatural (*Hipp.* 17-19) provides yet another reason for her anger.

The dialogue Hippolytus has with his Servant shows the folly of humans who do not respect the gods. The Servant concerned about Hippolytus' behaviour tries to persuade Hippolytus to be more cautious both in his condemnation of Aphrodite and his excess worship of Artemis. He argues it is wrong “to hate what's proud and not friendly to all” (*Hipp.* 93); being “affable” (*Hipp.* 95-6) brings rewards with not too much effort, to which Hippolytus agrees. The Servant further suggests humans should honour all the gods and asks if the gods felt the same (*Hipp.* 97). He cannot see why Hippolytus refuses to worship a “proud” Aphrodite (*Hipp.* 99) because in effect both Aphrodite and Artemis are revered in the divine meaning of the word.³⁵ The Servant tells Hippolytus once more that he should give “the honors due the gods” (*Hipp.* 107), but Hippolytus is intolerant of the old man's words and foolishly dismisses him, saying he cares only for Artemis (*Hipp.* 104). Hippolytus, by his contrariness of worshipping one god and not another, is proud in the sense of being “haughty” or “pompous”. Yet, Aphrodite is also proud in a similar way to

³⁴ Mastronarde suggests “tragedy depends for its effect” on this type of ambiguity (Mastronarde, 2010, p.188).

³⁵ The word “σεμνός” is used in two different ways — negatively as “proud” and positively as “revered” (Halleran, 2004, pp.156-7).

Hippolytus. There is a certain pomposity about her wanting revenge because he has insulted her superiority.

There is an interesting word use here. Euripides uses the same word to describe gods and humans but then in different ways to accentuate how a vulnerable Hippolytus is acting irrationally in the face of the powerful controlling gods.³⁶ It is only when Hippolytus is dying does he realise his pride has been his downfall. Finally, he realises, what others already know, that his irreverence to Aphrodite and his reluctance to free himself from the influence of the gods has destroyed his life (*Hipp.* 1401).

In contrast to Aphrodite, Artemis is portrayed initially as a kind and caring god. A seemingly concerned Artemis who has Hippolytus' interests at heart and wanting to maintain his good reputation (*Hipp.* 1299) is influential in reconciling the dying Hippolytus with his father. Even though she has been unable to prevent Aphrodite from "sating her desire" (*Hipp.* 1328) because of her respect and fear of the will of Zeus, Artemis tells Theseus the truth about Phaedra's lies (*Hipp.* 1281-1324). At this point, Artemis plays a conciliatory role. First, she lays the blame for Hippolytus' death on Theseus. She says that although Theseus did not commit filicide his murderous intentions were meant "impiously" (*Hipp.* 1287). She mentions the irony of Poseidon acting as a loving father when he listened and helped his son by giving him one of the three curses to use against Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 1318-19), whereas Theseus "did terrible things" (*Hipp.* 1325). Artemis believes Theseus is "evil" (*Hipp.* 1320) to both her and Poseidon because Theseus did not consider the

³⁶ See Goff for a discussion on the meaning of "σεμνός" (Goff, 1990, pp.85-6) and also Gregory (Gregory, 1991, pp.58-9). For further discussion on the ambiguity of "σεμνός" see W.S. Barrett (W.S. Barrett, 1964, pp.176-80).

consequences of his actions when he exiled Hippolytus, and was too quick to decide Hippolytus was guilty (*Hipp.* 1320-4).

Again humans are portrayed morally and intellectually inadequate and incapable of making their own choices in the face of the wise and more capable gods. Theseus' actions towards his son highlight the moral irresponsibility of a father to look after his son. It is only when Theseus is made to realise his error that Artemis forgives him and says he was in ignorance of the truth thus releasing him from his "wickedness" (*Hipp.* 1335). If Theseus killed Hippolytus in ignorance, it was because "mortals err greatly when the gods bring it about" (*Hipp.* 1433-4).

Artemis tells Hippolytus the evil (*Hipp.* 1338) that fell on Theseus is part of Aphrodite's vengeful destruction towards him. Artemis, now keen to lay the blame on Aphrodite, exonerates Theseus from some responsibility. Artemis has cleverly manipulated both Hippolytus and Theseus into realising Aphrodite was to blame for Hippolytus' death. Artemis, who is Hippolytus' "dearest" (*Hipp.* 1394), tells him that Aphrodite's vengeance is the result of his lack of reverence and her vexation about his "virtue" (*Hipp.* 1402). The conflict is over for Hippolytus and Theseus, but Artemis intends to avenge Hippolytus with promises of retaliation against Aphrodite's next favourite (*Hipp.* 1419-20). Even though Artemis is urging Hippolytus to forgive his father, there is no forgiveness for Aphrodite and so divine conflict between the two goddesses and the hold they have over humans continues.

Artemis leaves after telling Hippolytus not to hate his father, that it is his *moira* (*Hipp.* 1436) to die and promises him a cult in his name at Trozen (*Hipp.* 1423-30). Hippolytus forgives his father; he is sad for Theseus and frees him from pollution (*Hipp.* 1449). Their reconciliation has been divinely managed. It is only in Hippolytus' last moments that both Hippolytus and Theseus realise they have been

mistreated by Aphrodite and deserted by Artemis. The friendship Hippolytus thought he had with Artemis is not reciprocated — she did nothing to prevent his death and leaves him as he is dying (*Hipp.* 1440). Theseus admits the gods deluded him and Hippolytus, now at peace with his father, and no longer angry with him, wishes he could curse the gods (*Hipp.* 1414-15). Neither, however, has been able to prevent unrelenting and ruthless divine intervention in their lives. With the death of Hippolytus Aphrodite has managed to destroy Theseus' family. The play shows the power of the gods in the face of human error, ignorance and lack of communication.

In *Ion*, although Apollo is an integral part of the plot driving the actions of the humans and animals, such as Hermes, Xouthos, the Priestess and the dove, he is not responsible for the feelings of lost faith in the gods and the guilt that Kreousa experiences from the “shameful” (*Ion.* 288) incident that has happened to her. Unlike Phaedra who experiences shame because of her love for her stepson (*Hipp.* 246) and the disgrace she has caused her husband (*Hipp.* 408, 420, 719, 721), the shame Kreousa experiences is because she has given birth to a child after being raped by a god. This might seem a fate worse than Phaedra's but Euripides portrays Kreousa as stronger than Phaedra because, even in her suffering and anguish, Kreousa does not think about killing herself.

Although Apollo may be considered as a ‘bad’ god who rapes a human woman causing her great distress (*Ion.* 859-922), he is also a ‘benevolent’ god who makes good his original wrong by rescuing their child (*Ion.* 28-34), and later making arrangements to ensure that Ion is thought of as a human's real son (*Ion.* 70). After Kreousa is forced by shame and social convention to abandon the child in a cave (*Ion.* 231), Apollo asks Hermes to take the child to the sanctuary at Delphi where Apollo's Priestess rescues the child and lets him grow up safe as a servant of Apollo.

So far, Apollo has made sure his son is looked after, and Ion is happy believing he is both the servant and by implication the son of Apollo (*Ion*, 309-11). This sets in train a chain of events that brings only more distress — Apollo has made good some of his wrong but has failed to grasp the distressing possibility his further action can have for humans. This emphasizes the distinction between the complexities and possibilities of human frailty and sensitivity and the un-nuanced activities of the, sometimes, insensitive gods.

Kreousa, not realising her son has been saved by Apollo, has little regard for the god who caused her so much pain when she was younger (*Ion*. 1311).³⁷ Kreousa has kept the secret of his birth from her father (*Ion*. 14), her husband (*Ion*. 72), and Ion himself (*Ion*. 257). It is only when she fears for her life that Kreousa tells the Old Man (*Ion*. 947) of her situation.³⁸ The shame she felt, at having an illegitimate child meant she had to abandon the child (*Ion*. 860) and never reveal its existence. She has lost faith in Apollo and questions his justice (*Ion*. 252) because she believes he has abandoned her (*Ion*. 358), made her suffer over the loss of her child (*Ion*. 342), and allowed their child to be eaten by wild beasts (*Ion*. 348). Ion first believing Kreousa's shame (*Ion*. 341) was the result of the "wrongdoing" (*Ion*. 341) of a man, then assuming Apollo wanted to keep his relationship with a human a secret, thinks

³⁷ (Burnett, 1962, p.90). Lee takes issue with some critics, in particular Burnett, who, he says, view Kreousa as some one who "almost brings disaster upon herself" (Lee, 1997, p.27). Lee thinks this view untenable. She is, he thinks, "neither impious nor faithless" (Lee, 1997, p.28) and has no socially acceptable alternative to being the victim of rape. It is Apollo who instead of punishing her is the one who reunites her with Ion so giving her the "very deepest joy" (*Ion*. 1460) and Athens its future leader.

³⁸ Kreousa is the last remaining child of Erechtheus, and therefore the only heiress to her father's wealth. Ion, the child she gave birth to after Apollo raped her, would be illegitimate as she is unmarried. Under Athenian law, Ion would have no rights to his mother's wealth or name (*Ion*. 1540-5). With no male relative to marry, Kreousa marries a foreigner, Xouthos, and so again any children they have cannot inherit the Erechtheid wealth.

the god should also experience shame (*Ion*. 367) for being unjust to a woman by raping her (*Ion*. 436-51).

In human terms these are justifiable complaints — grievances made from a position of fear, shame and ignorance; emotions that are not divinely initiated nor divinely understood. Apollo's rape of Kreousa, although causing distress and upset, in no way prevented her from living her life as a royal princess. Even though she felt guilty about abandoning Ion, Apollo made sure she was free from public shame by not letting anyone know she was giving birth (*Ion*. 1595-6). In this, Apollo has "managed everything excellently" (*Ion*. 1594), and Hermes confirms this when he says Kreousa gave birth at home and "without her father's knowledge" (*Ion*. 14-15). Again this interference does not satisfy basic human emotional needs. Ultimately Kreousa is more concerned about the shame she suffered as an unmarried mother, and being a childless wife, than the disregard she felt Apollo had for her.

Divine benevolence continues to drive the action when Apollo makes Xouthos believe Ion to be his son so that Ion can inherit his just position and wealth. This plan, to make sure Ion is looked after, is thwarted only because of the emotions and actions of Kreousa, Xouthos and Ion. Faced with a divine lack of concern for the mother of his child and an unawareness of the harm he has caused, Kreousa sees Apollo as the cause of her unbearable emotional problem. Even so, Apollo also shows some concern for her welfare. Athena reveals this when she says it was Apollo who made sure Kreousa did not kill Ion and that Ion did not kill Kreousa (*Ion*. 1565). Apollo has not abandoned Kreousa, as she believes nor has he abandoned Ion (*Ion*. 67-8). In the end Athena also reveals that Apollo made sure Kreousa was reunited with her son (*Ion*. 1566-7). This only accentuates divine detachment — words from one god about another show disdainful ignorance of the suffering of humans. Yet,

Athena appeals to Ion and Kreousa's human nature when she tells them she is "not hostile" (*Ion*.1553) and they should not fear her. A benevolent Athena, has, like Artemis in *Hippolytus* and Thetis in *Andromache*, a special relationship with humans as she is capable of operating on a human level as well as providing the dramatic device of a voice of authority as she gives explanations about what *has* happened and removes any doubts about what *will* happen to the characters.³⁹ This looks to a happier future and brings the audience closer to the myths, but at the same time allows the audience, at a safe distance, to ask questions about what is happening to relationships between gods and humans.⁴⁰

Gods can change their behaviour when dealing with humans and often use their power selectively.⁴¹ *Ion* is not a play that lays blame on the behaviour of the gods; but neither does it exonerate Apollo for causing humans to suffer. Apollo, even though not physically present on stage, has orchestrated events and foreseen Ion's role as a future leader, but within the context of his divine control the humans have also played their part. What Apollo did not foresee was the driving force of Ion and Kreousa's vengeful murderous intention towards each other. The god did not count on the passions of the humans: a mother's guilty conscience and shame of abandoning a child to die; a young man's confusion not knowing who his parents are; the lies and untruths from the Chorus; the amorality of the Old Man; and the

³⁹ *Hippolytus* ends with a promise from Artemis of starting a cult in honour of Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 1423) and in *Ion* and *Andromache* a new dynasty is begun (*Ion.* 1570-88) (*Andr.* 1243-51).

⁴⁰ (Mastronarde, 2010, p.158).

⁴¹ For example, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Artemis sends a storm to prevent Agamemnon from sailing (*Ag.* 147). Hera remorselessly pursues the defeat of the Trojans because of her feelings towards Zeus' support of the Greeks (Camps, 1980, p.24). This attitude put humans, not only at the conventional disadvantage of being in a less powerful position than a god, but also the disadvantage of not knowing how any god may act or react to circumstances at any particular time.

vengeance, hatred and love resident in both Kreousa and Ion. However, Apollo, because he has intervened to make sure Kreousa and Ion are reunited also demonstrates caring emotions normally attributed to humans. The gods in *Hippolytus* are more devious and have varying degrees of concern for humans, but Euripides, in *Ion*, shows that gods also have distinct human emotions, values and morals.

In *Andromache*, although ritual practices are not limited, the presence of the gods and their influence on events and humans is restricted. At the beginning, Andromache is at the altar of a benevolent Thetis seeking sanctuary, the only place where she might feel safe. This is a reminder of the importance of supplication and portrays Andromache, to the audience, as a character to be respected. A number of supplications take place in this play. Andromache, for example, supplicates at the altar until line 411 when, hoping to save Molossos, she leaves the sanctuary. Molossos' supplication is even more poignant. When he calls Menelaus his "friend" (*Andr.* 531), in an attempt to give a reason why he should be saved, he supplicates Menelaus to spare him from death. This emotional entreaty on stage where a small boy kneels at the feet of his murderer has high impact in highlighting the moral culpability of intention to kill innocent children. Reminding Peleus about what has happened, and with her hands still bound, Andromache supplicates him for help (*Andr.* 571-6). Again supplication evokes *pathos*. The plight of a defenceless woman bound and unable to move (Andromache is not untied until line 717 when Peleus, with the help of Molossos, releases the ties around her wrists) is in direct contrast to the arrogant Menelaus whose attempt at murder is said by the Chorus to be "godless, lawless, thankless" (*Andr.* 491).

The ritual of Neoptolemus' arrival in Delphi, where he has gone in order to apologise to Apollo (*Andr.* 51-5) and his consequent death, is reported by the

Messenger and has significance for portraying Apollo as a malevolent god. Orestes, with his lies, had already convinced the Delphians that Neoptolemus is intent on causing trouble (*Andr.* 1005) and predicts Apollo will be instrumental in destroying the proud Neoptolemus. This is proved right as an unfortunate Neoptolemus is involved in acts of desecration when he fights the armed guards in the temple (*Andr.* 1136-45).⁴² Such conduct is unacceptable and although Neoptolemus wished to make amends to Apollo for his father's death at Troy (*Andr.* 1003-4) his behaviour angered the god. Divine hostility takes the form of a supernatural voice (*Andr.* 1147-8),⁴³ which rallies the guards to fight and kill Neoptolemus (*Andr.* 1149). Here, Apollo is typical of gods who cannot forgive humans who do not show respect.⁴⁴ This does not, however, bring about universal human respect, as humans do not hold back from questioning the god's authority. The Chorus, critical of Apollo, says he failed to save Troy and commanded Orestes to kill his mother (*Andr.* 1031-6). The Chorus cannot believe a god could commit such an evil act (*Andr.* 1036). The Messenger challenges Apollo's wisdom asking why the "arbiter of justice for mankind" should remember "old quarrels" and seeks divine revenge (*Andr.* 1160-5). For Neoptolemus his 'crime', like all humans, was to expect justice from a god and believe the god would share human feelings of forgiveness.⁴⁵ The two forces, at times seemingly unbridgeable, of divine power and human passion, merge ever closer.

⁴² Like Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, Neoptolemus is killed on consecrated ground. Dionysos is reminded that gods should not show anger like humans, but Dionysos, like Apollo, has been insulted and is not prepared to forgive (*Bacch.* 1344-51).

⁴³ Stevens believes this is the voice of Apollo (Stevens, 1971, p.233).

⁴⁴ Neither can Aphrodite forgive Hippolytus for his disrespect (*Hipp.* 13-14).

⁴⁵ (Burnett, 1971, p.153).

Apollo is a cruel god in this play, but at the end of the play, a more caring and compassionate Thetis consoles her human husband Peleus, and demonstrates how gods can live happily with humans (*Andr.* 1245-55). His divine wife, Thetis, arrives to offer her sympathy and understanding for his distress about the death of Neoptolemus. She explains that this is Zeus' will (*Andr.* 1269), then reminds him that Molossos, the great grandson he saved, will continue the family line and his descendants will be kings of Molossia (*Andr.* 1249). She also offers Peleus the promise of immortality (*Andr.* 1255) and so "bridges the gap between human and divine perspectives".⁴⁶ This is the case for Peleus, but for Andromache and Molossos, their fate is determined entirely by humans. There may be a divine warning with Apollo's decision to kill Neoptolemus, but for the main characters the tables are turned — the gods no longer feature as having any influence over human behaviour.

⁴⁶ (Allan, 2000, p.266).

CONCLUSION

εἷς παῖς ὃδ' ἦν μοι λοιπός, ὀφθαλμὸς βίου
τοῦτον κτανεῖν μέλλουσιν οἷς δοκεῖ τάδε.
οὐ δῆτα τοῦμοῦ γ' οὔνεκ' ἀθλίου βίου
ἐν τῷιδε μὲν γὰρ ἐλπίς, εἰ σωθήσεται,
ἐμοὶ δ' ὄνειδος μὴ θανεῖν ὑπὲρ τέκνου.

This one child I had left, the most precious thing in my life;
And those who have made this decision are going to kill him.

No! Not for the sake of *my* wretched life.

In him there is hope, if he is saved;
for me, shame not to die for my child.

(*Andr.* 406-10)

Notwithstanding the depiction of the great heroes of myth — their achievements and dramatic undertakings of war and cause — it is something more ‘human’ that dominates the work of the tragedians of fifth century BC Athens. Close loving associations, family relationships, responsibilities and expectations are exposed by the *pathos* of the most vulnerable family members — children. Often trapped as victims in this other battleground, children’s voices reach out from the dramas in their exploration of human frailty, divine power and ordinance, and the strains and tensions imposed on both human and divine standards of morality.

Retrieving the ‘voices’ of children from an analysis of the tragedies has, for audiences and scholars provided a bridge to discovering how the playwrights constructed the characters’ experiences and feelings. This analysis has revealed a range of ‘dramatic’ children’s emotional relationships within their family environment and their familial and social experiences. Using the voices of children, the tragedies depict unsettling and extreme occurrences: abandonment; human sacrifice; and murder within the family environment. For an Athenian audience concerned about passing on wealth, continuance of the family name and loyalty to the *oikos* or *polis* such suffering and emotional turmoil presented on stage offered opportunities for reflection and re-assessment of their own understanding of the plays and any inconsistencies brought out when considering their own family lives. Their meaning within tragedy, however, goes further than this, and this extension of meaning is found in particular in Euripides.

For any audience Euripides’ treatment of ‘dramatic’ children is compelling. Certainly, children are valued emotionally, financially and as practical objects, but throughout Euripides’ plays, more than in Aeschylus’ and Sophocles’ plays,¹ children are perceived as ‘special people’² whether in the family group, society or for

¹ For example, Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* deals with the fates of the characters in respect of divine interference and justice. Sophocles’ *Electra* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* deal with stalwart characters who, in their uncompromising way, put their families at risk.

² The Greek word starting with “φιλτατ” meaning “dearest, most loved” occurs one hundred and twenty three times in Euripides’ plays, forty four times in Sophocles’ plays and twenty two times in Aeschylus’ plays (*TLG*). That Euripides uses the word more times than Aeschylus or Sophocles could be due to considerably more plays of Euripides being extant. Of particular interest is the difference between Aeschylus, whose plays have an emotional intensity and persuasive lyrical language and Sophocles, whose impressive, but perhaps harsher language, describes and develops the human characters in his plays.

political gain.³ Euripides presents children used and abused in a variety of ways, each time asking the audience to engage with the reason why and with the outcomes.

Euripides' experimentation with the *pathos* of the suffering of children creates many responses, the most obvious being an appreciation of the emotional value of children within the family unit. In the tragedies, as in fifth century BC Athens, children were valued; as Golden says, "Athenians loved their children and grieved for them deeply when they died".⁴ External to the play, a "second-order analysis"⁵ refers to the ways in which the dynamics of a play can be read as mapping those of society. The ancient audience is, therefore, conditioned by its own physical, political and religious experience of fifth century BC Athens as well as the mythological understanding and horizons it brings to the theatre experience.⁶ Within the plays, the characters express political and religious views. Such underlying ideas again cause the audience to consider their own society's values and to assess any differences put forward. For example, Andromache talks about the Spartans, as the "most loathed of mortals to the whole human race!" (*Andr.* 445-6). Performed in 425 BC this play exposes the horror of war and its effect on men and women at a time when Athens was still at war with Sparta. As the *polis* developed so did new cults and ideas of religious ideology.⁷ Utilising this idea, in Euripides' *Electra*, there is

³ Against this, Zeitlin thinks that, in respect of children's experiences, Euripides, in particular, increases an awareness of their "emotional expression bordering on the sentimental". (Zeitlin, 2008, p.331).

⁴ (M. Golden, 1993, p.89).

⁵ (Mastrorade, 2010, p.311).

⁶ Mitchell, for example, adapts the *Oresteia* for a twenty first century audience. In her production of *The Home Guard* (at The National Theatre, 1999-2000), the nineteen fifties style clothes from Oxfam, the chorus of war veterans in wheel chairs wearing poppies and attended by Red Cross nurses, place the play in its present time.

⁷ (Goldhill, 2004, pp.67-8).

criticism of the gods; Castor in Euripides' *Electra* says Apollo, although wise, gave Electra and Orestes "unwise bidding" (E. *El.* 1245-6).

Human values, laws and codes seem invariably to be swept aside by the ever present and morally disdainful gods. In Greek tragedy it is the gods who, in their capricious involvement in the lives of humans, sit firmly in control. The case, however, is not as clear cut as it seems. Using and abusing children in tragedy tests extremes of human emotion to the limit, and when hatred, jealousy, guilt and remorse are mixed with the confusion of rights and responsibilities, the balance of divine and human power is thrown open to question.

Euripides engages most with this tension as he portrays the hierarchical differences between humans and their gods and the varying levels of malevolence or benevolence gods can display towards humans. For example, Pentheus, Heracles and Iphigenia are all subject to divine malevolence. At the same time, Euripides comes closer than Aeschylus or Sophocles in demonstrating how the power of the gods is eroded as human nature wins out and the gods grow ever closer to the human way. Apollo's concern for Kreousa in *Ion*, and Thetis' sympathy for Peleus in *Andromache* are both human emotions. This movement from power to tolerance brings out the potentially beneficial strengths found in the fabric of human passion and frailty. Consequently, as humans gain more control over their destiny so their ability to deal with their passions is strengthened. Resolving their own crises with understanding and a focus on fairness and justice accentuates the importance of the human world, where the importance for society lies in the success of the family. When, in *Andromache*, (and to a lesser extent in *Ion*) the child is saved, the pendulum of power has swung away from the gods as it is made clear that without

their intervention human family life can thrive in a way that would otherwise be hindered (and even destroyed).

The good intentions of Peleus and the love Andromache has for her son are the aspirational human emotions that triumph over the undesirable human emotions of jealousy, fear and hatred. The result is the continuance of the family kept together not by divine influence but by human moral endeavour. In *Ion* and *Andromache* the possibility for humans to create their own destiny, in ways that have far reaching human importance, shows that humans can step out of what seems to be so often the dazzling spotlight of the gods and take responsibility for themselves. In these two plays Euripides shows that despite divine intervention humans are still capable of human decency and, more than this, human decency provides a moral basis for conduct that transcends divine authority, so much so that the divine powers themselves are drawn towards it.

In this way, revealing the voice of the child in tragedy, exposing the crucial role of the most vulnerable, brings out more than sentiment and *pathos*. The role of the child acts as a mechanism central to exposing transition of all human agents from fearful victims of the divine to more confident and independent members of freethinking humanity. This release from divine control, portrayed particularly in *Andromache* in the context of the familiar environment of the family, signals the possibility of release from superstition and its replacement by the governing force of the morally responsive family. A progressive process of questioning the necessity of the gods to rightful human action points up a course that leads ultimately to enlightenment and the potential for human independence from reliance on superstition.

The conclusion is clear and unavoidable. Children in Greek tragedy have the pivotal role of showing the family to be capable of repairing itself and establishing values sufficient for it to recover from the very worst events. This role may be played out with or without the involvement, interference, or influence of the gods. The understanding of this makes way for a fresh emphasis and interpretation of Greek tragedy and offers new ground for further analyses of the tragic form and its implications.

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Sculpture

GR 1805.7-3.183 (Sculpture 628), The Townley Collection, British Museum, London.